

ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ

# MÖRÂN 'ETH'Ö

James Puthuparampil O.I.C.

## MARIOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF MAR JACOB OF SERUGH (451-521)



St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI)  
Baker Hill, Kottayam – 686 001  
Kerala, India

2005



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by

**James Puthuparampil O.I.C.**

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# CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
PREFACE	15
EDITORIAL	17
INTRODUCTION	18
CHAPTER I	
Introduction	25
1. A Brief Description of the Life and Works of Mar Jacob of Serugh.....	26
2. Metric Homilies ( <i>Mêmrê</i> ).....	28
3. The Concept of Mystery According to Mar Jacob.....	31
3.1. How to Understand this Mystery?.....	32
3.2. Mar Jacob's Approach to Divine Mystery.....	35
4. Symbolic Theology.....	44
4.1. Symbols.....	47
4.2. Poetry.....	50
4.3. Paradoxes.....	53
5. The Factors that Influenced Mar Jacob.....	56
5.1. Theological Milieu of Jacob.....	57
5.2. Syriac Tradition.....	67
5.3. The Influence of the Greek Fathers.....	69
5.4. The Influence of the Apocryphal Writings.....	70

6. Jacob’s Christology..... 72

7. Jacob: Interpreter of the Holy Scripture.....76

8. Mariology..... 84

Conclusion ..... 85

CHAPTER II

Introduction..... 87

1. The Mystery of Mary .....88

2. Mary: The “Ark of the Covenant” (Aroono dâqyomo  
ܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܐܩܝܡܐ).....89

2.1. The “Ark of the Covenant” in the Bible..... 91

2.2. Mary: The “Ark full of Mysteries” ?(aroono ïmle rozê  
ܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܝܡܠܐ ܕܪܙܐ) ..... 93

2.3. Mary: The “Ark full of Fire” (qîbûtho ïmalyo nûro  
ܩܝܒܘܬܗ ܕܝܡܠܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ) ..... 95

2.3.1. Mary and the Symbol of Fire that Burns up the  
Thorns of Sin ..... 96

2.3.2. Mary: the Source of Light that Removes the  
Darkness of the World ..... 98

2.4. Mary: The “Ark of Scriptures” (qîbûtho malyâth safre  
ܩܝܒܘܬܗ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܨܝܦܪܐ) ..... 100

2.5. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the  
“Ark of the Covenant” ..... 102

3. The “Second Heaven” (ðmâyo d’tarthen ܕܡܝܐ ܕܬܪܬܝܢ) ...105

3.1. “Second Heaven” – The Biblical Foundation ..... 105

3.2. The Womb contained Him Whom the Heaven could not contain .....	106
3.3. Mary Outshines Heaven .....	108
3.4. God Dwells in Mary, Yet He is Incomprehensible.....	110
3.5. The Theological Significance of the “Second Heaven” .....	115
<b>4. The Symbol of the “Shining Castle”</b> <i>(bîrtho p’ytho ܬܚܝܬܐ ܦܝܬܐ)</i> .....	<b>116</b>
4.1. “Shining Castle”: Symbol of Mary’s Pure Body .....	116
4.2. The “Shining Castle” - Dual Symbol of Maternity and Virginity.....	118
4.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Shining Castle” .....	119
<b>5. The Symbol of the “Pure Temple” (<i>nawso dakyo</i> <i>ܢܘܨܐ ܕܐܚܝܐ)</i> in Which the King Dwelt .....</b>	<b>120</b>
5.1. The “Pure Temple” - Biblical Foundation .....	121
5.2. Mary: The “Pure Temple ” .....	123
5.3. Every Christian as a Temple.....	125
5.4. Theological Significance of the “Pure Temple”.....	127
<b>6. The “Celestial Chariot”</b> <i>(markabto daðmâyono ܡܪܟܒܬܐ ܕܐܕܡܝܐܢܐ)</i> .....	<b>128</b>
6.1. The Biblical Foundation of the Symbol of the “Chariot”.....	128
6.2. The “Celestial Chariot” – Understood in the Syrian Tradition .....	130
6.3. The Symbol of the “Celestial Chariot” as Developed by Mar Jacob .....	131

6.4. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Celestial Chariot”.....	135
<b>7. The “New Well” (<i>bîro hdtho</i> خزانة جديدة) .....</b>	<b>137</b>
7.1. The Biblical Background of the “New Well”.....	137
7.2. Mary: the “New Well” - the Source of “Living Water”.....	140
7.3. Theological Significance of the “New Well” .....	142
<b>8. The Symbol of the “Tabernacle” (<i>š'kintho &amp; qubtho</i> معكبة - خيمة) .....</b>	<b>143</b>
8.1. The Biblical Foundation of the “Tabernacle” .....	144
8.2. The Symbol of the “Tabernacle” and Mary .....	145
8.3. The Theological Significance of the “Tabernacle” .....	147
<b>9. The Symbol of the “Cloud” of Mount Sinai (<i>enôno 'al tursînâi</i> غمامة على جبل سيناء) .....</b>	<b>150</b>
9.1. Biblical Foundation of the Symbol of the “Cloud”.....	150
9.2. The Symbol of the “Cloud” and Joseph’s Attitude towards Mary.....	151
9.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Cloud”.....	153
Conclusion.....	154

### CHAPTER III

Introduction .....	155
1. Early References to Mary’s Virginity.....	156
2. Etymological Analysis of the Word “Virgin”.....	159
3. The Imagery of Virginity.....	160
4. Mary’s Betrothal to Joseph .....	167



4.1. Christ's Descendence from David .....	167
4.2. The Inscription of Christ's Name among the Kings.....	170
4.3. Mary's Protection, Safety and Good Name.....	171
<b>5. Mar Jacob's Understanding of Mary's Virginity .....</b>	<b>172</b>
5.1. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary .....	172
5.2. Mary's Virginity: the Fulfilment of the Old Testament Prophecy.....	174
5.3. Mary's Perpetual Virginity: A Sign that Her Child is the Son of God .....	176
5.4. Mary's Holiness .....	177
5.5. The Spiritual Aspect of Mary's Virginity .....	181
<b>6. The Symbols of Mary's Virginity .....</b>	<b>186</b>
6.1. The Symbol of the "The Closed Door" ( <i>thar'o dâhîd</i> ܬܪܝܐ ܕܐܗܝܕ).....	186
6.1.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol "Closed Door" .....	187
6.1.2. Mary: The "Closed Door".....	190
6.1.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol: "Closed Door" .....	194
6.2. The Symbol of the "Sealed Letter" ( <i>egârtho htîmtho</i> ܝܓܪܬܐ ܗܬܝܡܬܐ) .....	195
6.2.1. The Biblical Context of the "Sealed Letter".....	195
6.2.2. Mary: the "Sealed Letter" .....	198
6.2.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol: "Sealed Letter" .....	205
6.3. The Symbol: the "Unploughed Land" ( <i>ar'o dlo</i> <i>ethpalhâth</i> ܐܪܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܝܬܝܬܝܠ) that Produces Corn .....	207

6.3.1.	The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the “Unploughed Land” .....	208
6.3.2.	Mary: the “Unploughed Land” that Produces Corn.....	210
6.3.3.	The Theological Significance of the “Unploughed Land” that Produces Corn .....	213
6.4.	The Symbol: the “Unpruned Vine” ( <i>sâtho lo kashuh</i> ሰጥሎ ካሻህ) that Produces Grapes .....	214
6.4.1.	The Biblical Background of the “Unpruned Vine”.....	215
6.4.2.	Mary: the “Unpruned Vine” that Produces Grapes .....	216
6.4.3.	The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Unpruned Vine” that Produces Grapes .....	217
6.5.	The Symbol of the “Thirsty Land” ( <i>ar’o zahîtho</i> ላላ ሕጻኝ) from which Germinates a Shoot .....	217
6.5.1.	The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the “Thirsty Land” .....	218
6.5.2.	Mary: the “Thirsty Land” that Germinates a Shoot .....	219
6.5.3.	The Theological Significance of “Thirsty Land” that Germinates a Shoot .....	222
6.6.	The Symbol: “Gideon’s Fleece” ( <i>geztho d’Gideôn</i> ገረጽ ወገድ) on Which Dew was Showered .....	223
6.6.1.	The Biblical Background of “Gideon’s Fleece” .....	223
6.6.2.	Mary: the Fleece and the Son of God: the Dew.....	224
6.6.3.	The Theological Significance of “Gideon’s Fleece”.....	225
	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>225</b>

## CHAPTER IV

Introduction	227
1. The Symbol of the “Powerful City” ( <i>mdîtho thuqpo</i> مَدْيِثَا ثُوَقْپَا )	228
1.1. The Biblical Foundation of the “Powerful City”	228
1.2. The “Powerful City”: A Symbol of a Covenantal Relationship	230
1.3. Mar Jacob’s Description of the “Powerful City”	234
1.4. Mary: the Faithful Partner in the Covenant	238
1.5. Theological Significance of the “Powerful City”	241
2. The “Second Eve” ( <i>hawa d’tharthen</i> هَوَا دَثَارْتَهْنَ )	242
2.1. The Biblical Foundation of the Symbol the “Second Eve”	243
2.2. The Eve-Mary Parallelism in the Fathers	243
2.3. Eve-Mary Parallelism in Mar Jacob	245
2.4. Mother of the Living	250
2.5. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Second Eve”	253
3. The Symbol: “Ship of Treasure” ( <i>elfo d’ gâze</i> اَلْفَا دْ غَاظَا )	255
3.1. The Biblical Analysis of the Symbol “Ship of Treasure”	255
3.2. The Symbol of the “Ship of Treasure” in the Syrian Tradition	257
3.3. The “Ship of Treasure” in Mar Jacob	260
3.4. Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Ship of Treasure”	265

4. The “New Pitcher of Elisha” (*quqtho hdtho d’Eliša*  
          ܩܘܩܬܗ ܕܗܕܬܗ ܕܐܠܝܫܐ) ..... 266

4.1. The Biblical Background of the “New Pitcher of Elisha”....266

4.2. Mar Jacob’s Application of the Symbol of the  
      “New Pitcher of Elisha”..... 266

4.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbolism of the  
      “New Pitcher of Elisha” ..... 268

Conclusion ..... 269

CHAPTER V

Introduction..... 271

1. Redemption in Christ According to Mar Jacob ..... 271

1.1. The Redemption in Terms of the Descent and Ascent  
      of Christ or the Acts and Fruits of Redemption ..... 275

1.2. Redemption Realized in History ..... 285

2. Christ the Redeemer – The Biblical Symbols .....289

2.1. “The Lamb of God” (ܥܡܪܐ ܕ’ܐܠܗܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) ..... 289

2.1.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol “Lamb of God”...289

2.1.2. Mar Jacob’s Treatment of the Symbol “Lamb of God”.... 293

2.1.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol  
      “Lamb of God” ..... 295

2.2. Christ the “Bridegroom” (ܗܬܗܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ)..... 297

2.2.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the  
      “Bridegroom”..... 297

2.2.2. Mar Jacob’s Treatment of the Symbol of the  
      “Bridegroom” ..... 299

2.2.3.	The Theological Significance of the symbol of the “Bride groom” .....	306
2.3.	The Symbol of the “Physician” (osyo ܡܠܝܟܐ) .....	307
2.3.1.	The Biblical background of the Symbol of the “Physician” .....	307
2.3.2.	Mar Jacob’s Treatment of the Symbol of the “Physician” .....	309
2.3.3.	The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Physician” .....	313
2.4.	The Symbol of the “Tree of Life” (îlon hâyo ܐܝܠܢ ܗܝܐ) .....	314
2.4.1.	The Biblical Background of the Symbol “Tree of Life” ...	314
2.4.2.	Mar Jacob’s Presentation of the Symbol of the “Tree of Life” .....	316
2.4.3.	The Theological significance of the Symbol of the “Tree of Life” .....	320
3.	<b>The Redemption: God’s Plan and His Action and Mary’s Role in It .....</b>	<b>322</b>
3.1.	Redemption through Incarnation .....	322
3.2.	Mary’s Response and Co-operation with the Plan of God ...	323
3.3.	The Paschal Mystery –Mary at the Foot of the Cross .....	325
3.4.	The Resurrection and Mary .....	326
3.5.	Pentecost and Mary.....	328
4.	<b>Mary’s Participation in Our Redemption .....</b>	<b>328</b>
4.1.	Christ in Heaven: the Perennial Source of Our Redemption .....	328
4.2.	Mary as Redeemed .....	329



4.3. Mary’s Contribution to the Redemption ..... 330

4.4. Mary’s Death and Burial ..... 333

4.5. Mary Now in Heaven ..... 337

4.6. Mary and the Church ..... 339

4.7. Mary and the Individual Christian ..... 340

4.8. Mary’s Continuous Intercession ..... 342

**Conclusion** .....344

  

**GENERAL CONCLUSION** ..... 346

**ABBREVIATION** ..... 356

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... 381

**APPENDIX** ..... i-xxi



## PREFACE

“Mariological Thought of Mar Jacob of Serugh (451-521)” is a doctoral thesis submitted to Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome for the degree of Doctorate in Theology. This book is an attempt to study the Mariological perspectives of Mar Jacob of Serugh a great church father of the Syrian Church, who lived in the fifth and sixth centuries. Excerpts of his mariological hymns are used in many oriental churches. Hence this study will be useful to understand the symbolism and typological expressions of the mariological hymns used in oriental churches.

On completing this doctoral research, along with Mary, I magnify the Lord who helped me to bring this work to completion. In acknowledging my indebtedness to all those who have helped me in finishing this work, I place on record my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Manel Nin OSB, the director of this work, for his scholarly guidance, constant support, fraternal encouragement and readiness to help. I am much obliged to Professor Sarhad Jammo, the second director of this thesis, who from the very outset of this work helped me in structuring this work, improving its quality and in clarifying certain important expressions in Syriac language. I am indebted to Professor Sebastian Brock of the Oxford University, who has promptly corrected my English Translation of Mar Jacob’s Homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*. I am indebted to Prof. Steven Hawkes-Teeples, SJ, who pointed out the merits and shortcomings of this thesis. I am grateful to all Professors who helped me in the study of Syriac language in different Institutes and all Professors of the Faculty of Ecclesiastical Sciences of Pontificio Istituto Orientale. I express my gratitude to Rev. Fr. Jacob Thekeparampil (Director of St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, Kerala) who has always encouraged me to study Syriac language and literature.

With grateful feelings I remember Rev. Fr. Jerome Peedikaparampil OIC, the former Superior General of the Order of the Imitation of Christ. I am indebted to my present Superior General Rev. Fr. George Thomas OIC, and my Provincial Superior, Rev. Fr. Thomas Reji OIC, for their support. I am grateful to all my confreres for their prayers and encouragement. I express my

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I dedicate this book to the Malankara Catholic Church which has been elevated to Major Archiepiscopal Church by His Holiness John Paul II in February 2005.

Fr. James Puthuparampil O.I.C.

## EDITORIAL

Christians revere Mary as the Mother of God. This issue of MŌRĀN 'ETH'Ō deals with the Mariological Thought of Mar Jacob of Serugh (451-521).

Fr.James Puthuparampil OIC is a member of the Order of the Imitation of Christ. He secured a doctoral degree in oriental theology from Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome for his research in Syriac Patrology. Presently he is the director of Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, Institute of Oriental Theology which is an extension Centre of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune.

The entire text of the thesis presented by Dr.James Puthuparampil OIC forms the content of this number of MŌRĀN 'ETH'Ō. His research is a well-rounded treatise on the mystery of Mary, theologically significant and substantial as it concentrates on the truths we all hold dear regarding Mary as virgin, Mother of God and Humanity's Hope. The thesis leads the reader to a Mariology which is essentially and deeply related to Christology.



# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Mother is a term, which arouses various sentiments in us. It stands for the personification of selfless love, for a mother loves her child without expecting anything in exchange. A mother's love is unconditional. Her concern and care are to be wondered at, and there is nothing comparable to it except God's love for human beings, as we read in the Book of Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is 49:15).

Mary is the virgin Mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. She is a mother *par excellence* for the Church as well as for each and every believer. Mar Jacob of Serugh<sup>1</sup> (450-521), in his reflections on the mother of the Son of God, was not only taken up by the tender sentiments and feelings surrounding a mother, but looked at her divine motherhood with wonder. He realized that her divine motherhood is a mystery and he sang beautifully about it. This is a mystery because the transcendent and almighty God whom the heavens cannot contain took human birth by confining Himself in the womb of a poor virgin girl. This mystery goes beyond human comprehension. This incomprehensible mystery, however, is neither to be discarded nor to be explained systematically, but to be encountered with faith, love and admiration.

This dissertation is an attempt to explore and appreciate the Mariological thoughts of this fifth century biblical scholar, who plunged deeply into biblical revelation and meditated on the mystery of Mary.

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<sup>1</sup> Different authors write "Serugh" differently, such as Sarug, Serug and Serugh. For the sake of consistency in this thesis, I write it "Serugh."

## 1. Clarification of the Concept ‘Mother of God’

The use of the title “Mother of God” dates back to the Council of Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> Mar Jacob of Serugh, who lived in the second half of the fifth century, did not often use the expression *yoldāth ālōho*, ܝܠܕܬܐ ܐܠܳܗܐ (Mother of God) without specification. This might have been because he took care, to avoid an expression, which was polemical to his fellow Christians, who had not accepted this title. But such expressions as the ‘Virgin Mother’,<sup>3</sup> the ‘Mother of the Son of God’, the ‘Mother of Jesus Christ and Son of God’,<sup>4</sup> point to Mar Jacob’s conviction of the divine motherhood of Mary. Based on the biblical accounts of the Annunciation, Visitation to Elizabeth, *Magnificat*, Nativity and the finding of the child in the temple, Mar Jacob in his *mêmrê* ܡܡܪܐ (metric homilies) on the Mother of God, dealt with the divine maternity of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In fact, there is a mention of the title ‘Mother of God’, in his *Letter on Faith to the Blessed of Arzoun in Persia*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although from the early centuries of Christianity most Christians called Mary ‘Mother of God’, the origins of this title are obscure. The first use of this title comes from Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, the predecessor of Athanasius. In the context of the Arian heresy he referred to Mary as ‘Theotokos’ in his letter around the year 319. Cf. Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to Alexander of Constantinople* 12 (PG 18:568); Cf. A. Nachev, *Mary: Virgin Mother in the Theological Thought of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzen, & St. Gregory of Nyssa*, Dayton, 1997, 17; K. Coyle, *Mary in the Christian Tradition*, Mystic, 1996, 11; G. I. Söll, “Mary Mother of Jesus”, in *EEC*, 1992, 538.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, SMS, 640, ET By M. Hansbury, *Jacob of Serugh: On the Mother of God*, New York, 1998, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 93.

<sup>5</sup> Here we quote the FT of the Syriac text: “Il est seul l’Unique de Dieu, le même qui est né deux fois et à qui on compte, de même, deux naissance, mais en qui on ne connaît pas deux personnes: le même, qui a été engendré sans commencement, sans corps et sans sortie hors du Père, est né dans un corps pris à la vierge sainte, Marie, Mère de Dieu, dans sa virginité.” M. Albert, “Lettre de foi

According to him, Christ, the one who is begotten without beginning, without body and without getting out of the Father, is born in body taken from the holy virgin Mary, the Mother of God in her virginity.<sup>6</sup> I will be dealing with this elaborately in the second chapter of this dissertation.

## 2. Why Mar Jacob of Serugh?

Referring to the attitude of theologians towards Syriac Patristic works, J. Zingerle, in 1887 wrote that it was a pity that theologians ignored the fact that Syriac texts are a precious source. Although he considered Jacob of Serugh to be a “Monophysite”, J. Zingerle, wrote “it is not an obstacle to acknowledge and to use what is good and true in his writings.”<sup>7</sup> While writing about Jacob of Serugh and his typology, he wrote: “Jacob of Serugh does not belong to those oriental writers who are of interest only to the Syrologist; theologians are increasingly paying their attention to him; it would be good if in dogmatic treatises his name were mentioned more often than has been the case up to now.”<sup>8</sup>

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de Jacques de Saroug aux Bienheureux d'Arzoun”, in *OrSyr* 12 (1967), 491-504; Cf. B. P. Sony *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la creation et l'anthropologie*, 101. P. Krüger, in explaining the Christological position of Mar Jacob writes that for him Mary was the Mother of God: “Entsprechend seiner Christologie hat Jakob auch die Gottesmutter als Theotokos anerkannt.” P. Krüger, “War Jakob von Serugh Katholic oder Monophysit?”, in *OS* 2 (1953), 204.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae quotquot supersunt*, ed., G. Olinder, Paris, 1937, 33, Cf. M. Albert, “Lettre de foi de Jacques de Saroug aux Bienheureux d'Arzoun”, 502.

<sup>7</sup> J. Zingerle, “Eine ungedruckte Homilie Jakobs von Sarug übersetzt und erklärt, (Über Jakob von Sarug und seine Typologie)”, in *ZKT* 11 (1887), 92.

<sup>8</sup> “Jakob von Sarug gehört nicht mehr zu jenen orientalischen Schriftstellern, welche bloß den Syrologen interessiren (sic. interessieren); auch die Theologen wenden ihm immer mehr ihre Aufmerksamkeit zu; es wäre nur zu wünschen, dass in dogmatischen Werken noch häufiger auf ihn hingewiesen würde, als



It was Mar Jacob's rich theological expressions that inspired me to study his theological visions especially his theological position on Mary. While reading a Maundy Thursday prayer, printed in the Malayalam translation of the *šhīmo*, **منسج** (Book of divine office) I was curious to know the source of this prayer. The prayer can be translated as "The Lord who created *Adam from the earth*, who made *water flow from the rock*, who caused a *lamb* to be brought forth *from the tree* and who was born of a virgin, took in His holy hands bread and wine and blessed, and having made it His body and blood, gave it for the salvation of humankind."<sup>9</sup> I, in my curiosity, was surprised to come across these expressions scattered throughout Mar Jacob's different homilies, and hence decided upon to pursue the study of Mar Jacob's Mariological homilies.

The second reason is the liturgical influence that Mar Jacob exercised in the Malankara Catholic Church to which I belong. Although the name "Jacob" is well known to the children of this ecclesial patrimony through the *bōūtho* **ܚܘܬܐ** of Mar Jacob, it may not be very clear to many as to whether the "*bōūtho*" is called after Jacob of Edessa or Jacob of Serugh. From the '*dodecasyllabic*' character of our author's metric hymnody, we understand that here Jacob of Serugh is intended. Hence we understand that Jacob of Serugh has a prominent place in liturgical tradition, and so a research in the field of Jacob's *mēmre* **ܡܡܪܐ** (metric homilies) will also be beneficial in understanding liturgy.

### 3. Source of the Study

For my study I have mainly made use of the eight homilies which have been edited by P. Bedjan, under the title *S. Martyrii qui et Sahdona, quae supersunt omnia*, Paris 1902, 614-774. This work has been facilitated by the English Translation of three of these homilies by T. Kollampampil and four by M. Hansbury. Thanks to the encouragement of Professor Manel Nin OSB, the director of this thesis, I have translated the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* which I give as an appendix to this dissertation. Besides these homilies I have utilized extensively Mar Jacob's other

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es bisher geschehen ist." J. Zingerle, "Eine ungedruckte Homilie Jakobs von Sarug", 92.

<sup>9</sup> *Šhīmo*, (Malayalam translation), Tiruvalla, 1982, 7.

homilies when and where necessary, and these are mentioned in the bibliography.

In order to understand the biblical background of the symbols employed by Mar Jacob, I have been privileged to have the Holy Bible as the second primary source.<sup>10</sup> In this monograph I do not intend to bring in materials extraneous to the topic. However, since it was useful for our study, I have consulted patristic literature, theological studies and dictionaries. For the development of the themes, I also have referred to Mar Jacob's predecessors Aphrahat and St. Ephrem, but, to avoid multiplication in this field, I have limited it to a minimum because Fr. R. Murray's magnificent work *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* is available to English readers.

#### **4. Scope and Method-Why Mariology?**

Mariology has a relevance today. The present time, because of the Mariological discussions can almost be compared to the fifth century which was predominantly marked by Christological discussions. On the one hand, there are discussions around formulating a new Marian dogma: "Mary as Co-redemptrix." On the other hand, theologians of other denominations and catholic theologians warn the Catholic Church of the danger in the field of ecumenism, if a new dogma is formulated. So, given the contemporary importance of the topic, I thought of studying whether a Syriac Father who lived fifteen centuries ago, had something to offer about such developments in theology.

The West Syrian Church, in her liturgical texts has very extensive material which deals with Mary's divine motherhood and permanent virginity. Both the laity and the clergy who during their divine office sing Mariological hymns decorated with the pearls of symbols, do not seem to comprehend their significance. So, this study aims at explaining the meaning of these symbols.

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<sup>10</sup> The references and abbreviations are taken from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments Catholic Edition for India*, Bangalore, 1980.



In order to explore the Mariological and theological aspects, I have applied an analytical and synthetic method in this study. The first chapter is an introductory chapter to the entire thesis, for which I have had to depend on the studies done on Mar Jacob's writings. For the thematic development of the other four chapters I will select the symbols employed by Mar Jacob, for he has resorted to using symbols and poetic language for the treatment of these themes. I shall try to study them using a three-tier system that is to look at the biblical foundation of the symbol, to analyse Mar Jacob's text and to see the theological significance of the symbol.

## 5. Limits of the Study

The fact that Mar Jacob does not have a treatise on Mariology is a limitation of my work. So, I will be trying to extract the Mariological thoughts of Mar Jacob from his different works. Since he has written a large number of compositions on different themes, it is difficult to localize the theme. One will find traces of Mar Jacob's Mariological thoughts where one least expects it; for example, in the homily *On Samson* one will find a reference to the Annunciation through the angel. The fact that I have not been able to consult the vast corpus of his writings is also a limitation of my study. Since this study is not comparative, but a study of an author who lived approximately 1500 years ago, I have not consulted many modern Mariologists in my work.

## 6. Structure of the Study

My work comprises of five chapters. In the first chapter I will give an introduction to Mar Jacob's life and works. I will deal with his approach to divine mystery and the relevance of symbols and poetic imagery through the employment of which he dealt with the mystery of Mary. In order to understand Mar Jacob's thoughts, it is necessary to understand the factors that have influenced him. So, I will have a look at four important factors: the theological milieu, the Syriac tradition, the influence of the Greek Fathers and the influence of apocryphal writings. I will also give a synopsis of Mar Jacob's scriptural exegesis and theological understanding.

The second and third chapters deal with the divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of Mary respectively. In the fourth chapter I present Mar Jacob's perspectives on Mary as the "hope of humanity." As mentioned above, I will pick up the major biblical symbols employed by our theologian-poet and see how he applied them to present Mary's divine motherhood, perpetual virginity and his concept about her as the hope of humanity. The last chapter pertains to Christ's redemption and Mary's participation in it. In studying four dominant biblical symbols that were used by Mar Jacob, I will explore his understanding of Christ's redemption, and then I will try to spell out his concept of Mary's participation in Christ's redemption.

I dedicate this book to the Malankara Catholic Church which has been elevated to Major Archiepiscopal Church by His Holiness John Paul II in February 2005.

## CHAPTER ONE

# MAR JACOB'S SYMBOLIC-POETIC METHODOLOGY FOR THE TREATMENT OF MYSTERY

### Introduction

In this introductory chapter of the research, I intend to give a brief sketch of the life and works of Mar Jacob of Serugh.<sup>1</sup> This research is based on Mar Jacob's understanding of mystery as expressed in his various metric homilies. Hence we need to deal with his concept of mystery, taking excerpts from his own works. Mar Jacob's methodology is symbolic-poetic, employing different figures of speech. He has imbibed this methodology from the Semitic background in which he was born and brought up. Mar Jacob, unwilling to engage in any current Christological controversy, had survived the trivial religious and political situation and had stood firm for the unity of the Church. The theological content of his works had been influenced by his *Sitz im Leben*. Therefore, we will try to see the theological milieu and the other factors that have influenced him. Mar Jacob combined the typological method and spiritual exegesis in his interpretation of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> J. B. Abbeloos, in *De vita et scriptis* and B. P. Sony in *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug* give a vast description on the life and works of Mar Jacob of Serugh. Hence we do not intend to give here a detailed biography. Cf. J.B. Abbeloos, *De Vita et scriptis sancti Jacobi Batnarum Sarugi in Mesopotamia episcopi*, Louvain 1867, 90-103; Cf. B. P. SONY, *La Doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la creation et l'anthropologie*, Rome, 1989, 45-56.



## 1. A Brief Description of the Life and Works of Mar Jacob of Serugh

Mar Jacob was born in Kurtam, a town in Mesopotamia. He received his education in the School of Edessa, where along with the study of the Psalms, liturgy, calligraphy, and study of the Fathers, the students also studied grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, music, geometry, arithmetic and astrology.<sup>2</sup> He lived a quiet life of prayer and resolutely avoided the theological controversies following the Council of Chalcedon which was held in the year he was born. His appointment as *Chorepiscopos* at Hawra is a clear sign of his talents in preaching and spiritual guidance.<sup>3</sup> He served as *Chorepiscopos* until 518<sup>4</sup> when he was consecrated Bishop of Batnan, a city about 10 Roman miles away from Urhai (Edessa), in the district of Serugh (modern Suruc).<sup>5</sup> Mar Jacob died on 29<sup>th</sup> November, 521.<sup>6</sup>

According to Bar Ebraya, five bishops were deputed to examine the doctrine in Mar Jacob's writings and so in this context he composed the *mêmro* مَـمـر "On the Vision of Ezekiel" which began like this: "Most High who is seated on the chariot above

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. P. Sony, *La Doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la creation et l'anthropologie*, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. T. Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, Rome, 1997, 3.

<sup>4</sup> The name *Chorepiscopos* stands for the bishop of a village. D.C. Morolli presents the office of the *Chorepiscopos* as follows: "Il termine deriva dal vocabolo Greco χωρεπισκοπος, a sua volta derivato dai lemmi χώρα (=paese, villaggio, regione) ed επισκοπος (vescovo); infatti, in Oriente il C. presiedeva una circoscrizione rurale o suburbana ed era abilitato ad amministrare l'ordinazione dei presbiteri, dei diaconi e dei lettori, ottenuta la licenza scritta del vescovo urbano. Dunque i C. o "vescovi suburbani", godettero nell'Oriente cristiano di grande autorità e prestigio, pur essendo il loro potere episcopale limitato rispetto a quello del vescovo urbano o eparchiale." D.C.Morolli, "Corepiscopo", in *Dizionario Enciclopedico dell'oriente Cristiano*, ed., E. G. Farrugia, Roma, 2000, 188.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. T.Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre", in *Le Muséon* 48 (1935), 88.



[...].” In this homily he spoke about the devastation of Amide. When the bishops heard this, they said that he was insane. But when the devastation of Amide actually took place, they believed that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and said that he should not cease to write.<sup>7</sup> A. Vööbus, in studying Mar Jacob's biographical account by Bar Ebraya, gives the following description:

His person was surrounded by the halo of great fame. His literary creativity exceeded everything that had been produced in the genre of *mênre*. There can scarcely be any doubt that he was most productive in his genre of literary creativity and that he was recognized in the eyes of his fellow believers as the greatest among the great. His contemporaries greeted the manifestations of his creative power with awe and respect. They speak with astonishment of the fact that during his lifetime a large staff of scribes and copyists engaged in securing his poetic production was put at his disposal.<sup>8</sup>

Mar Jacob, known as the “Flute of the Holy Spirit” is said to have composed seven hundred and sixty-three *mênre* (metrical homilies), forty-three letters, eight festal homilies, two lives of the saints, an anaphora and a baptismal liturgy.<sup>9</sup> According to some biographical accounts he began his metric compositions at the age of twenty-two. Of the seven hundred and sixty three homilies written by Mar Jacob, P. Bedjan has edited and published one

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<sup>7</sup> Barhebraeus, *Gregori Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, Vol.1, ed., J. B. Abbeloos & T. J. Lamy, Parisiis-Lovanii, 1872-1877, 192.

<sup>8</sup> A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, Vol. III, in *CSCO* 500 (sub.81), 1988, 119.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Graffin, “Jacques de Saroug”, in *DSP* Tome VIII, 56. Till 1989 only six homilies of Mar Jacob had been translated into English. Cf. Footnote 1 of the introduction to the translation of the “Second Homily on Elissaeus and on the King of Moab Who Sacrificed His Son on the Wall”, *HS* IV, 282-296, ET from *HTM TV* 1 (1989), 52. Afterwards, thanks to the translations of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, J. Thekeparampl, T. Kollampampil and M. Hansbury more than forty-three homilies are now available in English.

hundred and ninety five homilies in five volumes.<sup>10</sup> The liturgical hymns and melodies of Mar Jacob are a common patrimony of the Syrian Catholics, the Syrian Orthodox, the Maronites, Armenians, Malankara Orthodox and Malankara Catholics.<sup>11</sup> His feast is commemorated in these Churches on different days. B. P. Sony gives the following information regarding the date of Mar Jacob's feast. The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on 29<sup>th</sup> of November, on 8<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 29<sup>th</sup> of June and 29<sup>th</sup> of July, the Syrian Catholics celebrate it on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November and the Maronites on 27<sup>th</sup> of January and 5<sup>th</sup> of April. The Armenians celebrate it on 25<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Metric Homilies (*Mêmrê*)

Since Mar Jacob composed the majority of his works in *mêmro* /مَمْرو/, it will be useful to explain the word *mêmro*. J. Payne Smith gives different meanings for the word *mêmro*: speech, diction, a discourse, sermon, homily, especially a metrical homily and a treatise.<sup>13</sup> The *mêmrê* /مَمْرَة/ (verse narratives) are usually liturgical poems which, in an imaginative way narrate the well-known episodes from the Bible. According to S. Brock there are two different forms of metrical homilies. The first type is a biblical narrative "in the form of a sermon with the preacher interposing, here and there, an explanation or a homiletic expansion, often of a

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. "Introduction" to the translation in Jacob of Serugh, "The Second Homily on Elissaues and on the King of Moab who sacrificed his Son on the Wall", ET from HTM, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. T. Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 16; F. Graffin, "Jacques de Saroug", 56. Jacob of Serugh has also influenced the Assyro-chaldean tradition. S. Brock has identified a part of Jacob of Serugh's Prose Homily for the Resurrection in the East Syrian Hudra. Brock acknowledges that this is the "only place where the East Syrian liturgical tradition quotes a West Syrian writer who belonged to a time following the schism between these two traditions." S. BROCK, "An Extract from Jacob of Serugh in the East Syrian Hudra", in *OCP* 55 (1989), 339.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B. P. Sony, *La Doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la creation et l'anthropologie*, 56. Like the Syrian Catholics, the Malankara Catholics celebrate his feast on the 29<sup>th</sup> November.

<sup>13</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford, 1990, 247.



moralising nature.”<sup>14</sup> The second type of metrical homilies are “verse narratives where the homiletic element is either minimal or absent; the majority of these *mêmrê* are anonymous.”<sup>15</sup> We call Mar Jacob's metrical works “homilies”, although they may not have been homilies delivered in the Church as we have them today. According to S. Jammo, these classical metrical works were used in the “theological schools” that is, in the monasteries. Such compositions have been helpful for the purpose of teaching, because it is easier to memorize poetry than prose. These *mêmrê* ܡܡܪܐ have been composed in classical Aramaic, whereas the homilies have been delivered in the dialect of the people.<sup>16</sup>

G. K. Sarkis mentions that Mar Jacob is the inventor of ‘*dodecasyllabic*’ metrical hymnody,<sup>17</sup> which is characterized by verses of twelve syllables. This meter has been largely used by Mar Jacob and so, the West Syrians call this meter the “Meter of Mar Jacob.”<sup>18</sup> In the introduction to the translation of Mar Jacob's homilies by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, we read: “They are written in two-line units, each line consisting of twelve syllables. His style, while simple and straightforward, is full of striking imagery. Systematic rhyme, as later developed in Arab and European poetry, is not developed.”<sup>19</sup> These *mêmrê* ܡܡܪܐ were composed under the inspiration of the Bible and in a passage Mar Jacob opens himself to the working of the divine spirit.

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<sup>14</sup> S. Brock, “Syriac Liturgical Poetry – A Resource Today”, in *The Harp*, Vol. 7:9 (1995-1996), 60.

<sup>15</sup> S. Brock, “Syriac Liturgical Poetry- A Resource Today”, 61. S. Brock adds that these narratives are advantageous not only in giving insight into but also in making one “go back again and again to look at the details of the biblical text.”

<sup>16</sup> S. Jammo has shared his views with the author of this thesis in a personal meeting in March, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> G. K. Sarkis, “Notes sur les mètres poétiques syriaques”, in *OS* 3 (1958), 63-72; B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug, sur la creation et l'anthropologie*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> T. Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Introduction to “The Second Homily on Elissaues and on the King of Moab Who Sacrificed His Son on the Wall”, ET from HTM, 51.

I am giving the harp of my words to you and let me borrow  
your finger;  
and in your hymns let the sound whisper to your glory.  
By the impulse of the Spirit let my mind bring forth the  
homily of your praise,  
for I am not competent for your homily: please speak  
through me.  
I am the flute, when your word is breath and your story is  
the voice.  
Please take control of it, and by your means may we sing to  
you using what is your own.<sup>20</sup>

These poetic compositions which have been produced under the influence of the Holy Spirit might have earned him the name the “flute of the Holy Spirit.” A special feature is that the introductory part of the *mêmrê* مَعمَرَة contains an invocation to the Son of God. The content of this invocation is the acknowledgement of his unworthiness in delivering a homily on the story of the Son and begging God to empower him in this endeavour. Here we cite an example:

Son of the Virgin, grant me to speak about your mother,  
while I acknowledge that the word concerning her is too  
exalted for us.<sup>21</sup>

There is a similar invocation in the homily *On Thamar*. “Come, my Lord and my God and breathe your breath into me like into a hollow flute that I may produce a harmonious sound, moved by your love.”<sup>22</sup> He considers that the light from above is necessary in order to understand the Holy Scripture and that is why he begins the verse homilies with an invocation to the Son of God.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, Rome, 1997, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, SMS, 615; ET by M. HANSBURY, *Jacob of Serugh: On the Mother of God*, New York, 1998, 18.

<sup>22</sup> J. Zingerle, "Eine ungedruckte Homilie Jakobs von Sarug übersetzt und erklärt, (Über Jakob von Sarug und seine Typologie)", 107-108.



Another feature of Mar Jacob's *mêmrê* is its repetitive style. We notice the use of words and phrases repeated in his *mêmrê*. This is a common characteristic of all Semitic literature. As S. Jammo opines, this repetitive style facilitates the student to memorize the passage quickly.<sup>23</sup> Hence M. Papoutsakis was right in observing that repetition is not the "result of any lack of skill on Jacob's part, but rather as pertaining to the very mechanism according to which a homily is composed."<sup>24</sup>

### 3. The Concept of Mystery According to Mar Jacob

The word mystery (*rozo* ܪܙܐ ), utilized by Aphrahat and St. Ephrem is of Persian origin. As B. P. Sony has remarked, this word is characteristic of the typological exegesis of Mar Jacob.<sup>25</sup> According to B. P. Sony it is necessary to realize the main purpose of the *rāzâ*.

Il faut reconnaître en Jacques un exégète dont le but principal est christologique. Il ne s'arrête pas au *arozo* comme il ne s'arrête pas au sens textuel de l'Ancient Testament. Le *arozo* fut utile en son temps. Sa valeur était le résultat de sa signification christique: le Christ agit par l'intermédiaire du *arozo* dans le passé. Ce n'est pas le *arozo* en soi que guérit ou sauve dans *auroyto*, mais c'est le Christ. Jacques alors définit le

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<sup>23</sup> S. Jammo has clarified this aspect in a colloquy with the author of this thesis on 12.11.2001. In the "Introduction" to the "Second Homily on Elissaeus and on the King of Moab Who Sacrificed His Son on the Wall", we read that a "recourse to frequent restatement of an idea", serves to assure that a listener who missed a point on its first mention will grasp it on the second; these homilies were intended to be read aloud in a congregation." Cf. "Introduction" to the translation in Jacob of Serugh, "The Second Homily on Elissaues and on the King of Moab Who Sacrificed his Son on the Wall", ET from HTM, 51. We consider that it is not to a congregation of lay faithful, but to the monks of monasteries or to the students of theology that these homilies were being read.

<sup>24</sup> M. Papoutsakis, "Formulaic Language in the Metrical Homilies of Jacob of Serugh", in *OCA* 256 (1998), 445.

<sup>25</sup> B. P. Sony, *La Doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l'anthropologie*, 141. B. P. Sony gives four meanings for this word: mystery, sign, symbol and type.



*arozo* par une réalité “cachée” qui avait une valeur et agissait jusqu’à la venue du Christ.<sup>26</sup>

For human beings, God and Incarnation is a mystery. Through the Incarnation, God who is Infinite becomes finite and the Unlimited One limits Oneself in time and space. Mar Jacob considered God’s revelation to Israel as a foreshadowing of what was to be fulfilled in Christ. For example, he says that “a great mystery” is expounded in the blood of the Passover lamb. “It is Christ’s blood that is spoken of in the blood of the lamb.”<sup>27</sup> Since the Old Testament foreshadowing contained what was to be fulfilled in Christ, Mar Jacob calls it “a great mystery.”

### 3.1. How to Understand this Mystery?

According to Mar Jacob, in order to understand this mystery it is not an analysis of objects that is required but “a preparation of the mind” and “a purging of our hearing.”<sup>28</sup> Mar Jacob exhorts his audience to prepare themselves with a discerning attitude in order to listen to Mary’s story:

A wonderful discourse has now moved me to speak;  
you who are discerning, lovingly incline the ear of the soul!  
The story of Mary stirs in me, to show itself in wonder;  
you, wisely, prepare your minds!  
The holy Virgin calls me today to speak of her;  
let us purge our hearing for her luminous tale, lest it be  
dishonoured.<sup>29</sup>

This is an invitation to the listener to enter into the mystery as a partaker, and not to remain as a mere spectator. Mar Jacob’s notion of “mystery” is best expressed in his homily “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face.” He makes use of this homily to show the

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<sup>26</sup> B. P. Sony, *La Doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la creation et l’anthropologie*, 142.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, *HS* III, 292, ET by S. Brock, in *Sob / ECR* 3:1 (1981), 76.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

inter-relatedness of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the origin of the sacraments and the salvific death of Christ. The veil with which Moses had to cover his face after the theophany on Mount Sinai (Ex 34:33-34) "was only removed with our Lord in whom all secrets were explained to the entire world."<sup>30</sup> Here the mystery concerns the betrothal of Christ to the Church. What Moses taught the Israelites regarding marriage "that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, so that the two of them might be one completely"<sup>31</sup> is only a type of what the Son of God was to accomplish by His fidelity to the Church.

According to Mar Jacob, the veil on Moses' face, was a sign that he was keeping "a secret",<sup>32</sup> which was to be realized in the Son of God, for "the words and actions of prophecy are veiled [...] so that the world might not become openly aware of the Son of God."<sup>33</sup> Over and above this, he says that the marriage instruction of Moses was a teaching about "the chaste and holy union of bride and bridegroom, united in spirit and baptism."<sup>34</sup>

Within the exalted eye of prophecy Moses saw Christ,  
and how he and his Church would be one in the waters of Baptism;  
he saw him putting on her in the virgin womb  
and her putting on him in the baptismal water:  
bridegroom and the bride are spiritually perfected as one,  
and it was concerning them that Moses wrote 'the two shall be  
one.'<sup>35</sup>

The Son of God has disclosed this mystery from the virgin womb and "In the crucifixion he completed the types that had been depicted, and the hidden mystery that had been covered revealed itself."<sup>36</sup> The mystery based on man and wife is explained by Mar

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<sup>30</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 75.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 81.

Jacob like this: He laid the foundation for the sacraments and in His death on the cross gave His body to the Church to enrich her. “She put him on in the water, she consumed him in the bread.”<sup>37</sup> According to Mar Jacob, the mystery is revealed at the crucifixion. The water and blood that came forth from the pierced side of Christ are seen “as an image of the divine children who are to become heirs to the Father who loves his only-begotten.”<sup>38</sup> Since He was crucified on a high hill, “the gentiles of the earth might see him and be healed by him of the bites from the foul demons.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the mystery concerns “the One without beginning who wished to become subject to a beginning.”<sup>40</sup>

Moses’ instructions on marriage in Genesis 2:24, are seen by Mar Jacob as a prefigure of the union of the Son of God with the Church. St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians has written on the ideal spousal relationship. This must be according to the pattern of Christ’s relationship to the Church, for “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 6:25). Mar Jacob develops this theme of Christ’s love for the Church using poetic imagery. It is a mystery, since what lay hidden in the writings of Moses becomes revealed in Christ’s being “born of a destitute girl” and in His giving Himself to the Church.<sup>41</sup> And the Church absorbs this mystery through a union that takes place in baptism and the Eucharist. Here Mar Jacob depicts the mystical union of the bride with her groom:

The betrothed made the daughter of day to enter a new  
womb,  
and the testing waters of baptism were in labour and gave  
rebirth to her:  
he rested in the water and invited her: she went down,  
clothed herself in him and ascended;

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<sup>37</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 124.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 75.



in the Eucharist she received him, and so Moses' words, that the two shall be one, were established.<sup>42</sup>

The homily "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face" helps us to understand that Mar Jacob enters into the depth of the Scripture and connects the revelations of the Old Testament to their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. It is this fulfilment of the Old Testament prefigure and prophecy that Mar Jacob brings out in his conception of Mystery.

### 3.2. Mar Jacob's Approach to Divine Mystery

An introduction to Mar Jacob's approach to the divine mysteries is useful before dealing with his Mariological thoughts. His reflections on the divine motherhood of Mary and her virginity are concrete representations of this approach. Mar Jacob identifies two methods: one is the approach of "investigation" and the other that of "love." The distinction between these two approaches depends on the attitude of the one who inquires into the divine realities. Mar Jacob considers the former approach as inappropriate and the latter as the most appropriate to speak about the subject under enquiry. While the method of "investigation" looks at the "mystery of Mary" as a "controversy", or as a problem to be dealt with, the approach of "love" takes it as a "mystery" and a "wonder" to be experienced and encountered.<sup>43</sup> The following passage from the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* unveils Mar Jacob's mind:

The matter of Mary is not to be interpreted by the wise,  
and the orators cannot speak with the course of their words.  
Love can speak about her matter *without disputation*,  
with a simplicity, which is higher and purer than *controversy*.  
Let us give now listening to love which has risen to speak,

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 75.

<sup>43</sup> T. Finn refers to the experiential aspect of Syriac theology. "Like typology elsewhere in early Christianity, Syriac typological thinking invites the participant to enter into and experience salvation." T. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism at the Catechumenate: West and East*, Collegeville, 1992, 114.

*without investigating about the virgin mother full of  
wonder.*<sup>44</sup>

Like St. Ephrem, Mar Jacob condemns the “investigative” and “prying” mentality. The right attitude needed for theology is the attitude of humility, love and discernment. As S. Brock affirms, “The choice of the former approach, however, will always prove to be the outcome of pride and preconceptions, while that of discernment will stem essentially from an attitude of faith, openness and love.”<sup>45</sup> Mar Jacob qualifies the characteristics of the two approaches as “contention” and “love” respectively:

There are two aspects for the word when it is debated;  
one that of *contention* and the other of *love* among  
discerning ones.<sup>46</sup>

The first approach is marked by analysis and investigation. In this approach God is seen like any other object of knowledge, and so there is a tendency, to use S. Brock’s words, to “dominate and subjugate” the object under enquiry.<sup>47</sup> Mar Jacob repeatedly abhors this tendency in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

And what will I do to the fool who is provoked because of  
my words,  
and is perverted and twisted and he does not listen to me the  
way I speak?  
The sound of thunder is a great silence to the ear of the deaf,  
and he does not hear even if all the creation sings.  
The eye of the blind, although ten thousand suns rise,  
is accustomed to night and to him the day is not useful.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iv. [My italics].

<sup>45</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye, The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, Moovattupuzha, 1985, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, T.Kollamparampil, 57. [My italics].

<sup>47</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xvi.



Through these words, Mar Jacob rebukes those who approach the divine mystery without the right attitude. When he admonishes his audience not to “pry into” or “scrutinize” the divine mystery, he does not mean that this is anti-intellectual, but rather, such warnings only point to what a right approach should be. We notice the same attitude to the divine mystery in St. Ephrem also. S. Brock, summarizes St. Ephrem's attitude this way:

Ephrem's current warnings against ‘investigation’ and ‘prying’ into the divine ‘hiddenness’ should not lead us to suppose that his attitude is anti-intellectual. Far from it, for the human intellect, as he sees it, has plenty of scope within creation, where its role is to search out the types and symbols available there to provide it with glimpses of understanding of divine reality. It is only when the intellect seeks to cross the ontological ‘chasm’ that it becomes reprehensible. The proper area for intellectual enquiry lies in the places where God has revealed himself in creation, the *galyata*, ‘revealed things.’<sup>49</sup>

Human beings can know God from His revelation in Scripture and in Nature; but this knowledge is not exhaustive. For example, we know that God has become human but we do not know the entire mystery of the Incarnation. Mar Jacob evidently brings out this aspect in his homily *On the Nativity of our Redeemer*:

Only that he was sent is revealed to us in the scriptures,  
but in what manner, however, is not heard because it is  
hidden.<sup>50</sup>

Mar Jacob clearly says that human beings cannot fully know “how” the nativity of the Son of God took place. In his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* he writes:

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<sup>49</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 48.

Among the pains of mothers and of the children,  
He preserved her virginal signs (*in a way*) *that you do not*  
*know how to comprehend.*<sup>51</sup>

This way of looking at the divine mystery is characteristic of the Syriac tradition.<sup>52</sup> We quote a passage from St. Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*:

A person who seeks after truth with a grudging spirit  
cannot gain knowledge even if he actually encounters it,  
for envy has clouded his mind  
and he does not get any the wiser, even if he grabs at that  
knowledge.<sup>53</sup>

The Syrian Fathers consider the investigative approach of human beings to the divine mystery, negatively. But they appreciate very much the approach of "love." S. Brock, in analysing this approach writes:

The correct approach, as Ephrem sees it, is to recognize the fact that if we can learn anything about God, it is only because He has 'bent down' first to the level of our understanding. A proper awareness of this will result in an attitude of wonder (*tehra*), a key word in Ephrem's hymns. It is the absence of a sense of wonder that leads to 'prying and investigation.'<sup>54</sup>

Mar Jacob, in his homilies uses four Syriac words which point to the attitude of investigation. One word is *adrek* ܐܕܪܝܟ <sup>55</sup> the *aphel*

<sup>51</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, vii. [My italics].

<sup>52</sup> In an article on Mary, Brock has brought out the concept of the Syriac Fathers regarding Mary's virginity. He writes: "Les écrivains syriaques soulignent régulièrement le fait de la virginité perpétuelle de Marie, mais il le considèrent comme un mystère qu'il ne convient pas de scruter. Pour Jacques de Saroug, l'Incarnation étant un fait entièrement miraculeux, comme tout miracle, elle échappe aux lois de la nature." S. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition Syriaque", in *Lettre de Ligugé*, Vol. 189 (1978), 7.

<sup>53</sup> Ephrem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Hymnen de Fide* 17:1, CSCO 240, Syri. 154, 67, ET by S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 783.

form of the root *drek* ܕܪܟ, which means to follow closely, overtake, come upon and to seize.<sup>56</sup> The other word is *āqeb*, ܐܩܒ, which in the *ethpa* form means to be sought out, investigated into.<sup>58</sup> The third is *b<sup>e</sup>zo* ܒܝܙܐ<sup>59</sup> which means search into or out, trace out, inquire into, investigate.<sup>60</sup> And the fourth word is *d<sup>e</sup>qār* ܕܩܐܪ,<sup>61</sup> which means to dig, break, pierce through.<sup>62</sup> The employment of these terms in the homilies shows his dislike for the investigative approach. In his homily *On the Nativity of our Redeemer*, he says that the birth of our Lord is not to be investigated.

His birth is divine as well as human  
and it is not to be investigated because His wonder is  
without limit.<sup>63</sup>

Mar Jacob believes that this method is authentic because it is biblical. He calls our attention to Ezekiel's prophecy in which this approach is brought out clearly. Here is an excerpt from the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

Ezekiel, it is your lot to speak today,  
speak upon Mary and hold back the investigation about her,  
Let us listen now what was said in prophecy,  
about this marvellous mother, who is not to be  
investigated.<sup>64</sup>

The method of love treats the "mystery of Mary" as a "wonder" and therefore safeguards the "mystery" nature of the subject matter. Mar Jacob's opinion is that if one tries to explain the whole mystery with one's wisdom, the aspect of wonder is removed from it:

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<sup>56</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 687.

<sup>58</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 424.

<sup>59</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 691.

<sup>60</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 687.

<sup>62</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 96.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, ix.



If you have explained the whole matter with your wisdom,  
wonder is taken away from the history and everything is  
revealed.

But there is still something greater which is hidden to you,  
you have investigated the Son and His nativity, and (so) you  
are very great!<sup>65</sup>

So, for him, the best approach is not “investigative”, but one of admiring the wonder that has taken place. The investigative approach belongs to the disputants, while the approach of “wonder” and “awe” belongs to the believer. In the homily *Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years*, Mar Jacob deals with the two births of Christ, one from the Father without beginning and the other in time through Mary. He emphasizes that this cannot be fully explained by human enquiry.

The Father begot *Him* without beginning in an astonishing  
marvel,  
And the Mother gave *Him* birth in her virginity, and this  
also was a miracle.  
The Virgin gave birth while remaining in her virginity;  
Words avail not and the miracle remains endued with great  
wondrousness.  
Nature and explanation have been overcome in His second  
nativity;  
The words of speakers have fallen short, and wonder has  
abounded.  
When the Virgin who giveth birth in her virginity is  
considered,  
She sendeth awe on sages and disputers.  
Nor would nature, if compelled, have the strength  
To explain this deed that has come to pass.  
Nature is overcome, explanation is overcome, speakers are  
overcome,  
And awe remains, presiding over the birth of the Son of  
God.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, vi.

<sup>66</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, *HS* III, 321-334; ET from HTM, TV 4 (1990), 39-40.



This passage is a good example for Mar Jacob's preference for the method of "love" which approaches the mystery with "wonder" through symbols and analogies. According to Mar Jacob it is the absence of faith which is associated with the investigative approach that engenders doubt<sup>67</sup>. In his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* he writes:

If there had been in your soul the wonder of faith,  
that wonder would have preserved you from doubts.  
If you had understood why Isaiah called Him "Wonder",  
you would have admired Him without investigating into the  
Unique One.<sup>68</sup>

He discourages the investigative approach because it will distort the nature of mystery. In his homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer* Mar Jacob narrates how pleasantly one can taste the sweetness of God as one begins to approach God with love and humility, and how dry one feels as one sets out to "investigate" the divine mystery with one's wisdom:

One speaks about you abundantly with love  
and one is moved with wonder and was silenced by your  
story.  
One glorified himself to investigate your birth, and he  
became a mockery,  
because he imagined that he knew, yet he was not aware  
that he did not know you.  
There is the 'wise person' who became puffed up with  
(book-) learning  
so as to speak of you, my Lord, but he was driven off  
because he assaulted you.  
There is the 'ignorant' who while not knowing how to  
speak,  
loves you and becomes greater than the 'wise' throughout  
his way.

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<sup>67</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, vii.

<sup>68</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, vii.

There is a 'knowledge' that has ascended to see how exalted  
 you are  
 but it burst, fell, and destroyed itself in the great chasm.<sup>69</sup>

In his metric homilies Mar Jacob seems to picture Mary as following the second approach in her attitude towards divine mystery and as enjoying its "fruits." In his homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, he states that the mystery was revealed to Mary because she had enquired about it and it was revealed to her. Only when the right question is raised at the right time, can a sufficient clarification be obtained. This is how Mar Jacob presents Mary's prudent inquiry:

Since Mary inquired she crushed inquiry from the  
 audacious,  
 and by her question she set down silence to the disputants.  
 If she had not stirred up a disputation with the watcher  
 disputation would have increased in the world concerning  
 her birth-giving.  
 If she had been silent when she had heard (the words),  
 "Behold, the Lord is with you",  
 iniquitous disputation would have choked the whole  
 world.<sup>70</sup>

Mar Jacob himself follows the second approach which is marked by humility, discernment and love. It may be deduced from his metric homilies that according to him Mary's role in the scenario of salvation is a mystery which may not fully be understood by humans. But one can somehow experience this mystery. It is analogous to tasting sugar. It is one thing to know the components of sugar and analyse the molecular structure of it. It is another thing to taste and see how sweet it is. Mar Jacob's methodology is the second approach. This is the motive of the Psalmist who invites the faithful: "O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!" (Ps 34:8). "How sweet are thy words to

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<sup>69</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 112-113.

<sup>70</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 57.

my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps 119:103). In the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* Mar Jacob describes the right enquiry as a participatory knowledge which he expresses in terms such as the "tasting of wine" and "enjoying the banquet."

If the wine of my word is not sweet to you, do not drink it,  
leave it, there is sterile ground in which the crowds delight.  
Not for wage have I worked with you, or I am working,  
neither praise did I expect from you, nor do I seek (it).  
I have set upon the table (things) coming from the gift of  
your Lord,  
if it is pleasing for you, enjoy with us; and if not, depart.<sup>71</sup>

God has come down to us because He loved His creation. This love of God can be experienced by those who seek him with an attitude of faith and love. Mar Jacob presents Mary as having made the right enquiry in the right way which had become beneficial to her.

See, the inquiry of the blessed woman, how beneficial it  
was!  
For, if she had kept silent this truth would not have shone  
forth.  
She asked, learned, and henceforth she did not doubt.  
The truth shone forth to her and after she saw it she did not  
inquire into it.  
She refined her senses and cleansed her mouth by the  
inquiries.  
She bound her word so that she might not again inquire into  
reverential matters.<sup>72</sup>

From this, it follows that enquiring into the divine mystery is not contrary to faith, but only that, the enquiry should be made with the proper disposition. Such an approach to divine mystery enables

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<sup>71</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, xvi.

<sup>72</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 59.



the hearer to wonder at God's mercy. The wonder surrounding the divine acts leads one to mystical silence.

We received Him freely, let us be pleased with Him,  
without contest,  
in His meadows He introduced us to feed, and let us rest  
sweetly.<sup>73</sup>

After having dealt with the theme of Mary's virginity through symbols, Mar Jacob feels that we cannot know more about her. This approach leads him to mystical silence. T. Kollamparampil rightly observes that Mar Jacob inherits this approach from the Syriac tradition. "As a poet and pastor of the Syriac tradition Jacob of Serugh propounds the mystery of Christ through his symbolic-typological vision that culminates in mystical silence."<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. Symbolic Theology

Since God is beyond human intellect, the human person cannot comprehend God as He is. One can know God in as much as God has revealed Himself.<sup>75</sup> There is a common principle in a person's attempt to know anything. This has been well stated by S. Brock: "the intellect that has the knowledge of something must be greater than the object of its knowledge. On such an understanding, anyone who claims that it is possible to know (and so describe) God is at the same time implying that the human intellect is capable of 'containing' God, the uncontainable."<sup>76</sup> This is what the Cappadocian Fathers objected to, as they rejected the Eunomian

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, ii.

<sup>74</sup> T. Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Since Mar Jacob is an heir of St. Ephrem's legacy, here it is good to note his views on divine revelation. S. Brock observes three main ways in Ephrem's understanding of divine revelation: "through types and symbols which are present in both Nature and in Scripture; through the 'names' or metaphors, which God allows to be used of Himself in Scripture; and above all of course in the Incarnation." S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 13.



view that the human mind can reach the very essence of God. They affirmed the absolute transcendence of God, saying that “no human word or thought is capable of comprehending what God *is*.”<sup>77</sup> Even though man cannot know God in His essence, the Fathers have spoken about the possibility of experiencing God which J. Meyendorff presents in the following words:

This means simply an opening of God, His existence outside of His own nature, His actions or “energies” through which He *voluntarily* reveals Himself to man, as well as a peculiar property of man, which permits him to reach outside of the created level. The meeting of God's love and “energy” and of man's capability to transcend himself is what makes an encounter possible, a “contemplation greater than knowledge” to which the Fathers refer as the “eyes of faith,” “the spirit,” or eventually, “deification.”<sup>78</sup>

The biblical authors perceived God at work in nature. The Psalmist sees the heavenly bodies and the regular alternation of day and night forming a melodious chorus raising a great hymn of praise to God (Ps 19:1-4). St. Paul also speaks about God as constantly revealing Himself, His invisible nature, His power and His divinity through the attributes of the created world (Rom 1:19:20). In order to describe such an encounter of faith, Mar Jacob considers ordinary language insufficient. Therefore he depends on poetic language in which he employs symbols and paradoxes. He considers poetic language as the most suitable way to explain the mystery of Mary. In explaining the mystery he establishes that the salvific acts realized in Mary have been prefigured in the Old Testament. The Syrian imagination is rich in biblical symbols and has deep meaning. We quote below a passage from Mar Jacob's homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

O Mary, you are the house of beauties and the storehouse of  
treasures,  
the Mother of the Sun, who generated unlimited light.

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<sup>77</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, New York, 1983, 11-12.

<sup>78</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 13.

Fastened purse, closed door, sealed richness,  
sealed holiness, womb preserved in virginity.<sup>79</sup>

He depicts in a beautiful way the divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of Mary through the symbolic expressions “house of beauties”, “fastened purse” and “closed door.” Concerning the importance of symbols in religious language, L. Dupré writes “Symbolic representations convey the involvement of the subject more easily than rational discourse. [...] Poetry and novels carry feelings more adequately than discursive language. For that reason the language of faith is always symbolic.”<sup>80</sup> It needs to be mentioned that the logic of symbolism is not mathematical. We have to keep this aspect in mind if we are to understand Mar Jacob’s account of Christ’s union with the Church at His baptism and at the time of His death on the Cross. This aspect is applicable also when he says that the Church is born from Christ’s side on the Cross. God who is immanent in creation and in human history manifests Himself through signs and symbols. As J. Kallarangatt states “the use of symbolic language in poetry as well as paradoxes and allegorical imageries are the most costly tools in the hands of the mystic.”<sup>81</sup> Upon understanding the importance of symbolism in Mar Jacob’s writings S. Brock cautions his readers thus:

Jacob’s way of thinking is essentially symbolic, and like Ephrem’s, it shuns the logic and precision of Greek thought; it can also be described as mythical – provided one uses this word without any overtones. Much of what he says about baptism will appear fanciful to the modern mind brought up on historical scholarship, and I should stress at the outset that it is essential to read Jacob on his own terms, and not approach him with our own western European presuppositions, if we are to appreciate his true originality and profundity. In other words, we must make an effort of the imagination in order to recapture this supra-historical way of thinking.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xix.

<sup>80</sup> L. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, Michigan, 2000, 65.

<sup>81</sup> J. Kallarangatt, *Reflections on Theology and Church*, Kottayam, 2001, 21.

<sup>82</sup> S. Brock, “Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh”, in *OCA* 205 (1978), 325-326.



## 4.1. Symbols

S. Happel defines a symbol as “a complex of gestures, sounds, images, and or words that evoke, invite, and persuade participation in that to which they refer.”<sup>83</sup> As G. Ramshaw states, a symbol represents “simultaneously many interpretative layers of something abstract.”<sup>84</sup> We can say that a symbol contains what it signifies and goes beyond. The Syriac word used to denote the word symbol is *rozo* ܠܐܝܬܐ. J. Payne Smith translates *rozo* ܠܐܝܬܐ “as anything having a secret or mystical meaning, a type, figure, sign, symbol, and likeness.”<sup>85</sup> In the early Syriac tradition the word *rozo* ܠܐܝܬܐ was widely used. R. Murray writes that “in the fourth century one and the same very important word *rozo* ܠܐܝܬܐ (mystery) is used for any religious symbol (especially Old Testament ‘types’) for sacramental rites and, in the plural, for the Eucharist.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, we use the word *symbol* (*rozo* ܠܐܝܬܐ) for the types, figures and imageries<sup>87</sup> that Mar Jacob employs in his homilies to refer to Mary. The common nature of types and symbols is that they are pointers to something. As S. Brock points out, from the subjective human perspective, type or symbol can be seen as “a revelation of some aspect of the divine hiddenness” and from the objective divine perspective that “some aspect of divine reality lies hidden in the type or symbol.”<sup>88</sup> Elsewhere S. Brock explains how types and symbols operate:

Types and symbols are means of expressing relationships and connections, of instilling meaning into everything. They operate in several different ways, between the Old Testament and the New,

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<sup>83</sup> S. Happel, “Symbol”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed., J. A. Komonchak, 1989, 997.

<sup>84</sup> G. Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language Keeping It Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive*, Minnesota, 1996, 25.

<sup>85</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 28.

<sup>86</sup> R. Murray, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge, 1975, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Concerning the role of such methodology T. Finn writes: “Whatever the term, the world-view behind Syriac typology is that the “old” event (Creation or Exodus or crossing the Jordan, for instance) paves the way for the “new” (Christ’s incarnation, His baptism, Christian baptism), in which the old achieves its promise.” T. FINN, *Early Christian Baptism at the Catechumenate: West and East*, 113.

<sup>88</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 27.

between this world and the heavenly, between the New Testament and the Sacraments, between the Sacraments and the eschaton. In every case they “reveal” something of what is otherwise “hidden.”<sup>89</sup>

Being metaphoric, symbolic language is different from logical conceptual language. The relationship between the symbol and the symbolized is by no means arbitrary, because the symbol effects what it signifies. In the words of A. Dulles, Christ as a symbol communicates Himself in grace. “Being the high point of the permeation of the human by the divine, Christ is the source and goal of all other saving events, which in various ways anticipate or reflect his coming. He may therefore be called the ‘primordial sacrament of redemption.’ Of him it may preeminently (sic. pre-eminently) be said that the symbol effects what it signifies.”<sup>90</sup> The meaning of symbol is polyvalent as W. Brennan writes:

“Symbols are not vague. But they are not precise concepts with one limited meaning, either. They are rich expressions of the meaning of reality. They are concrete and picturesque. They are sensible. They can have many meanings. In fact, they have to have many meanings. Who can put a sunset into an algebraic formula or abstract definition? Who can define love exhaustively and finally? Symbols are polyvalent, many-meaninged. Yet these many meanings are not whimsical or relativistic. The many meanings are united in the unity of the reality whose meaning they express. In fact, the symbol, unlike a sign actually joins the human who understands the reality he or she expresses symbolically, to the reality symbolized. It is how the word “God,” in prayer, has many meanings, yet is beyond them all. It is how that word at the same time joins the person praying to God as an invocation.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> S. Brock, “Introduction”, in *Saint Ephrem: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood, 1990, 42.

<sup>90</sup> A. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology from Symbol to System*, New York, 1996, 28.

<sup>91</sup> W. Brennan, *Mary: Servant, Mother, Woman: Theological Reflections on the Title Servant of Mary* Chicago, 1986, 63.



Mar Jacob's symbolic theology contains types from the Bible<sup>92</sup> and symbols from nature, through which he tries to unfold mysteries regarding Mary. In speaking about the enormous power of the symbols, A. Dulles writes that "they [Symbols] are signs imbued with a plenitude or depth of meaning that surpasses the capacities of conceptual thinking and propositional speech. A symbol, in this perspective, is a perceptible sign that evokes a realization of that which surpasses ordinary objective cognition."<sup>93</sup> Although Mar Jacob does not provide a precise definition of symbols, one can deduce his concept of symbols from his homilies. In his thinking, it is clear that God reveals Himself through symbols and they enable man to encounter the divine mystery. The significance of the biblical symbol consists in the hidden meaning it carries. Mar Jacob's symbolic presentation of mysteries is connected to the spiritual exegesis of the bible.<sup>94</sup>

We acknowledge that symbolic theology is a special characteristic of Syrian tradition. Mar Jacobs symbolic theology is a sign of his expertise in Scripture and depth in spiritual life. The explanation that he provides is an overflowing of his intimacy with God. As S. Beggiani writes: "Whatever be our wisdom and knowledge, our only approach to God is through contemplation, in faith and love, in silence. Therefore, only prayer can give birth to

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<sup>92</sup> A. Dulles observes that the biblical titles of Christ are formed out of human imagination. "The basic biblical descriptions of Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Lord, etc., not to mention more obviously metaphorical descriptions such as Light of the World, Good Shepherd, True Vine, and the like, are achievements of the religious imagination relying on symbolic materials made available by the religious traditions of ancient Israel." A. Dulles, *The Communication of Faith and its Content*, Washington, 1985, 6-7.

<sup>93</sup> A. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology from Symbol to System*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> B. P. Sony enumerates the classical images used by Mar Jacob where he refers to the spiritual sense. "les mots syriaques qu'il emploie sont: *aeskimo*, *asiloto*, *pel'to* (parabole), *auhdo* (énigme), *puhmo* (ressemblance), *surto* ou *salmo* ou *dmuto* (image et ressemblance), *telonito* (ombre), *matlo* (parabole). B. P. Sony, "La méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug", in *PdO* 9 (1978-80), 91.

theological thought. One can speak of things that pertain to God only if one is brought into divine intimacy through God's grace."<sup>95</sup> In order to mention here a few examples of the symbols, we cite two passages from his homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord*.

The new pitcher of Elisha has been explained to us  
because it is the young virgin girl in a symbol that sets the  
earth in order.<sup>96</sup>

The dew that Gideon found in the bowl when he prayed  
depicted the symbol of him who came down upon the fleece  
like rain.<sup>97</sup>

In line with St. Ephrem's thoughts, Mar Jacob finds ample symbols in the Scripture and nature concerning Mary's mysteries. In the homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer* he presents both Scripture and nature as two testimonies witnessing Mary's conception.<sup>98</sup>

And he who believes both in Nature and Scripture  
knows that the virginity of Mary was not dissolved.<sup>99</sup>

As we study the symbols concerning the mystery of Mary, it is not enough to look at them in a detached manner or to observe them as in a laboratory. One has to rely confidently on them as clues to the realities that they point to.

## 4.2. Poetry

The mystery of God's love and His condescension to humanity can be better expressed in poetical language. The Bible itself is the best example of poetic beauty where the use of symbols, metaphors,

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<sup>95</sup> S. Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality*, London, 1991, 13.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 115.

<sup>97</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 115.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 70.

<sup>99</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xx.



similes and paradoxes make the Word of God attractive. There are many symbolic expressions in the Bible: "Shepherd" (Jn 10:1-18) and "True Vine" (Jn 15:1-11) are only two such examples. The following text is an example of Christ's use of metaphor. When some of the Pharisees informed Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him, Jesus said to them "Go and tell that *fox*, 'Behold I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course'" (Lk 13:32). The context is that some Pharisees warn Jesus to flee from the murderous intentions of Herod Antipas and He replies with contempt. As I. H. Marshall writes, the motives of Herod and the Pharisees are uncertain. Jesus has a task to perform and "no Herod will be able to divert Him from it. He has, therefore, no need to flee at this juncture."<sup>100</sup> Since metaphor has different meanings, we will see diverse opinions about the meaning of "*Fox*" also. According to J. Nolland, "It is unclear whether the directive to go and tell Herod is rhetorical or is literally intended. If reported, the words would be quite provocative. "*Fox*" is best taken as an image of craftiness or slyness."<sup>101</sup> I. H. Marshall, in commenting on this passage states that "in the rabbinic literature the fox was typical of low cunning."<sup>102</sup>

Jesus in His preaching also made good use of simile. Regarding the foretelling of the salvation accomplished on the Cross, we read: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15). G. Ramshaw opines that a metaphor can be more true than fact, because "it contains many layers of meaning simultaneously."<sup>103</sup>

As we notice in the Bible, especially in the Psalms, the expressions of the sacred are well brought out in poetry. The Syrian

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<sup>100</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Exeter, 1978, 569.

<sup>101</sup> J. Nolland, "Lk 9: 21- 18:34", in *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 35B, eds., D. A. Hubbard, et al., Dallas, 1993, 740.

<sup>102</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 571.

<sup>103</sup> G. Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language, Keeping It Metaphoric, Making It Inclusive*, 8.



Fathers have written their homilies in poetic style. The teachers (*malpone* مَلْپُونَة) found this a better and speedier system of teaching. The students could learn it quickly and memorize it. Later on excerpts of these metric homilies were inserted into the divine office of the Church.<sup>104</sup> Their writings also reflect the theological situations or the context. So even in the present *Šhīmo* شَيْمُو of the West Syrians we find passages that condemn Nestorius and his teaching. We have seen that Mar Jacob's approach to theology is poetical and that in it he employs symbolic theology. In order to understand Mar Jacob's Mariological thoughts, it is necessary to deal with the symbols that he employed.

L. Dupré in *Symbols of the Sacred* depicts the nature of religious poetry thus: "Of course, not all religious poetry makes assertive claims. Nor does the poetic quality of a religious poem reside in the religious assertion as such, but rather in its rhythm, images and symbols."<sup>105</sup> It is the attitude of wonder that enables the poet to look at the divine mystery and narrate it through symbols and figures. In his homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord* Mar Jacob narrates the mystery depicted in the Scripture thus:

All his story is esteemed worthy of wonder and marvel  
for, the prophet too, while wondering about him, called Him  
a 'Marvel.'

If you seek an offspring by a virgin in her virginity,  
like Isaiah, call it a 'Marvel' and do not venture any further.

[...]

His way is spread out above the words of all wise men.  
His revelation is exalted above the senses of all Scribes.  
His nativity is set above the measure of all minds;

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<sup>104</sup> According to G. Y. Ibrahim (Mar) the compiler of the *Šhīmo* was probably Jacob of Edessa. It contains the hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, Isaac of Amida, Balai, Simon the Potter and Jacob of Serugh. G. Y. Ibrahim (Mar), "Nestorius in Syrian Orthodox Tradition: A Plea for Revision in the Light of Recent Research", SD III (Vienna 1998), 59-60.

<sup>105</sup> L. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, 72.

the whole of His economy runs high above the intellect.<sup>106</sup>

If you have a soul that is full of faith,

let your mind take flight and see that He is totally above and  
below.<sup>107</sup>

Mar Jacob's theologizing method is inherited from his predecessors, Aphrahat and St. Ephrem, who introduced symbolic theology. In explaining the relevance of this methodology in St. Ephrem's writings, S. Brock writes: "Ephrem's radically different approach is by way of paradox and symbolism, and for this purpose poetry proves a far more suitable vehicle than prose, seeing that poetry is much better capable of sustaining the essential dynamism and fluidity that is characteristic of this sort of approach to theology."<sup>108</sup> In the following chapters we will see how it is true of Mar Jacob also.

### 4.3. Paradoxes

We need paradoxical expressions in religious language so as to point out that it goes *beyond* rational expression. Paradoxes are amply used in the Scripture. As L. Dupré points out, it is because of the transcendent nature of religious language that we need paradoxical expressions in the realm of theology. "The whole purpose of language in this case is to turn the subject away from the objective world of ordinary language and to drive the person inside himself or herself. The language of revelation, therefore, must be understood entirely as paradoxical, even when it appears to conform to normal usage."<sup>109</sup> The message of salvation is communicated through apparently paradoxical expressions. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

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<sup>106</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 122.

<sup>107</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 123.

<sup>108</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 11.

<sup>109</sup> L. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, 59.

follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:34-35). If our talk about financial matters was paradoxical it would end up in bankruptcy because by "losing" money no one is "saving" it. But in the realm of salvation this paradox is really true.<sup>110</sup> It is in paradoxical terms that St. Paul also presents the message of salvation to the Philippians: "[...] but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:5-9).

Paradoxical expressions are important in religious language, and as W. Christian points out, this importance comes from the nature of the subject: "The mild version is that paradoxical expressions are necessary to suggest the extraordinariness of what is being alluded to in religious discourse."<sup>111</sup> There are many paradoxical expressions in Mar Jacob's *mêmrê* مَعمَرَة. We will see below a few examples from his homilies where paradoxical expressions effectively bring out the miraculous nativity of the Son of God:

The young ewe bent the knee to give birth to the Lion's  
Whelp,  
 to that Powerful One that Jacob wrote of in his blessings.  
 The young dove rested in her virginity so as to beget  
 the young Eagle, the Great King, in the small cave.  
 The beloved heifer lay down in her youthfulness to give  
birth to  
 the Fatted Ox which became the sacrifice on behalf of  
sinners.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> L. Dupré notes that it is because of the reference to a transobjective reality that the religious language is symbolic. Cf. L. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, 55.

<sup>111</sup> W. Christian, *Meaning and Truth in Religion*, Princeton, 1964, 154.

<sup>112</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.



Although Mar Jacob's depiction<sup>113</sup> is not identical with Isaiah 65:25, he seems to have been inspired by the imagery of the "glorious new creation" which Isaiah depicts in a paradoxical way. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the dust shall be serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD" (Is 65:25). In employing paradoxical pairs such as "young ewe-Lion's Whelp" and "young dove-young Eagle", Mar Jacob is depicting the picture of the Incarnation whereby the Creator has become a creature in order to redeem humanity. These paradoxical expressions focus on the different aspects of the extraordinary event of the Incarnation. We quote here two excerpts; one from his homily *On the Presentation of Our Lord* and the other from the *Second Homily on the Nativity* respectively:

A lump of earth carried in its hands the Sea and it embraced  
it [*the Sea*].

The Depth is collected in the cupped hands of dust but they  
were not dissolved.

The Flood is placed in the hands of the aged one, but it does  
not sweep them away,  
and by the fingers of soil the Lord of the seas is carried.

A straw solemnly carried the Flame but it is not burned up.

The Coal of Fire is placed on antique wood but it [*the Coal  
of Fire*] did not consume it [*the wood*].

The aged one carried the Lion's Whelp and embraced it.

Yet, the might of that Powerful One did not terrify him.<sup>114</sup>

The Living Fire wrapped itself round within the swaddling  
clothes;

And the briars and thorns that became aware of it, fled from  
its presence.

The Shepherd of the earth became a lamb within His own  
pasture;

and the wolves saw and began fleeing in their fright.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Lion's Whelp is surely an allusion to Genesis 49:9.

<sup>114</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 149.

Fire is a symbol of God's transcendence.<sup>116</sup> The paradoxical usage of "fire being wrapped in swaddling clothes" thematically refers to the Incarnation. This is comparable to Exodus 3:2 where "the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed." These expressions dynamically bring out the extraordinary event of God's condescension to humanity, His dwelling in a human person and His presence among the mortal ones. About the dynamic meaning of paradoxes, S. Brock writes:

To illustrate in a simple way the basic difference between what one may call the philosophical approach to theology, with its search for definitions, and the symbolic approach, one may visualize a circle with a point in the centre, where the point represents that aspect of God under enquiry. The philosophical approach seeks to identify and locate this central point, in other words, to define it, set boundaries to it. The symbolic approach, on the other hand, attempts no such things; rather, it will provide a series of paradoxical pairs of opposites, placing them at opposite points around the circumference of the circle; the central point is left undefined, but something of its nature and whereabouts can be inferred by joining up the various opposite points, the different paradoxes, on the circle's circumference. The former procedure can be seen as providing a static understanding of the centre point, while the latter offers an understanding that remains essentially dynamic in character.<sup>117</sup>

Thus we see that symbols, poetry and paradoxical expressions are very important for the explication of divine mystery. We will see in the following chapters how relevant they are in studying Mar Jacob's Mariological thoughts.

## 5. The Factors that Influenced Mar Jacob

Mar Jacob was dependent on a variety of factors as regards the style and content of his writings. He was an heir to the Syriac

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<sup>115</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 97.

<sup>116</sup> We deal with this symbol in the Second Chapter. See 2. 2.

<sup>117</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 11.



tradition especially transmitted through Aphrahat and Ephrem. His education at Edessa and the theological milieu following the division in the Church after the Councils of 431 and 451 greatly influenced his writings. As a premise to the situation, it needs to be mentioned that "He was famous for his love of peace and for his unwillingness to take part in arguments."<sup>118</sup>

### 5.1. Theological Milieu of Jacob

Mar Jacob lived in the time, after four Councils had tried to explain the faith in one God and the salvation accomplished in the Son of God. Jacob, who did not want to get involved in the dispute about Chalcedon, was forced by his fellow church-men to prove his loyalty by condemning Nestorius.<sup>119</sup> According to Mar Jacob, everything that could be said on the creed had already been said in Nicea and Constantinople.<sup>120</sup> He was unhappy about the theological controversies in the Church; his opinion was that the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople had defined the truth of the Church and considered the later Councils unnecessary. According to S. Brock, "Like Philoxenus, Jacob evidently felt that the Council of Chalcedon's Definition of Faith endangered the oneness of Christ."<sup>121</sup>

Mar Jacob's position in the Christological controversies was not polemic; this is clear from his election to the episcopate in 518, at a time when Severius, the representative of the Syrian Church was exiled for his opposition to the Council of Chalcedon. Mar G. Y. Ibrahim states that "Jacob of Serugh seems to have tried to preserve the unity of the Church by promoting the idea that the

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<sup>118</sup> G. Y. Ibrahim (Mar), "Nestorius in Syrian Orthodox Tradition: A Plea for Revision in the Light of Recent Research", 62.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. G. Y. Ibrahim (Mar), "Nestorius in Syrian Orthodox Tradition: A Plea for Revision in the Light of Recent Research", 57.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, "Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug", 28.

<sup>121</sup> S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, Kottayam, 1989, 25.





In his homily *On the Presentation of Our Lord* Mar Jacob clearly refutes the Arian principle that “there was when He was not.” He puts this passage on the mouth of the old Simeon:

You are the one who sanctifies the sacrificial offerings  
together with your Begetter.  
It is through you that the Levites' offerings are sanctified.  
The perfect sacrifices were offered to you because you are  
from eternity,  
and your Father granted propitiation to the ancient sacrifices  
through you.

[...]

There is no (time) when the Father is without you,  
and He received all sacrifices through you and with you.<sup>126</sup>

It was against Nestorianism that Mar Jacob spoke very vehemently. According to him, Nestorius and his dyophysitism<sup>127</sup> were the source of all dogmatic controversies of his epoch.<sup>128</sup> In a letter to the monks of Mar Bassus, Mar Jacob has written that if Nestorian books are suppressed and their doctrine is rejected there

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<sup>126</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 148.

<sup>127</sup> In the light of modern studies about Nestorius and his teachings, we understand that Nestorius was misunderstood by his contemporaries, especially by those who held the position of Cyril of Alexandria. We quote here a passage from S. A. Harvey's study on Nestorianism. “Nestorius was unjustly deposed and exiled for propagating Dyophysite theology to its heretical extreme: teaching that the second person of the Trinity was two persons, the man Jesus who was born, suffered, and died, and the divine Logos, eternal and unbegotten. The charges seriously distorted Nestorius' views. Moreover, the movement that bears his name did not involve him and does not itself deserve the heretical label, although it does represent a Christology that emphasizes the distinction between (as opposed to the unity of) Christ's human and divine natures (“Dyophysites” from the Greek *dyo physeis*, “two natures”).” S. A. Harvey, “Nestorianism”, in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed., E. Ferguson, New York, 1999, 806-807.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, “Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug”, 501.

will be peace on earth.<sup>129</sup> In referring to the different groups that reject the divine maternity of Mary, Mar Jacob refers to Nestorius in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

One wicked person says that she did not give birth to God,  
but the Messiah, since the Messiah is not God.<sup>130</sup>

Jacob of Serugh, adhering to Alexandrian Christology considered the doctrine of Chalcedon as a variant of the Nestorian heresy.<sup>131</sup> As J. Meyendorff opines “the strict Dyophysites were Chalcedonians who still rigidly maintained the Antiochian Christology, and who objected to some of Cyril’s propositions such as the Theopaschite formula: “One of the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh.”<sup>132</sup> Mar Jacob thought that Nestorius impugned the Trinity and replaced it by a Quaternity.<sup>133</sup> It was keeping this danger in mind that he wrote:

She did not give birth to two, and neither can she become  
two,  
One, she gave birth to One, divinely and humanly.<sup>134</sup>

In affirming that Christ is not two and that Mary did not give birth to two, Jacob is affirming Christ’s oneness. M. Hansbury notes that although Jacob studied at the School of Edessa and absorbed the heritage of Theodore of Mopsuestia, he eventually

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, “Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug”, 364.

<sup>130</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>131</sup> T. Jansma, “The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople”, in *NAKG* 44 (1960), 27.

<sup>132</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 34. As D. Attwater has well pointed out if the words of the monophysite symbol: “Holy God, holy strong One, holy deathless One, *who was crucified for us*, have mercy on us”, are addressed to God the Son alone there is nothing wrong with them. D. Attwater, *The Christian Churches of the East*, Vol. II *Churches in Communion with Rome*, Milwaukee, 1961, 183.

<sup>133</sup> T. Jansma, “The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople”, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xiv-xv.



took a position against Theodore's legacy.<sup>135</sup> Whenever it was possible he rejected the heresy of Dyophysitism. T. Jansma presents Jacob's aversion to Nestorianism in the following way: "From the moment when, coming upon one of Diodorus' writings as a young student at the School of Edessa, 'coerced by no one, but moved by divine grace alone', he learned to reject this Duophysitism, up to his last years he remained true to this rejection."<sup>136</sup>

Mar Jacob speaks also against Apollinarianism, a fourth century heresy that denied the human soul in Christ. F. Chiovaro in studying this heresy writes: "In his zeal to preserve the humanity of Christ, and his lack of a distinction between the concept of nature and person, Apollinaris relied on the Platonic trichotomy of the human being: body, sensitive soul, and rationality."<sup>137</sup> Apollinaris taught that the Word has taken the part of the spirit of man in Christ. Thus he explained Christ's being exempted from sin. In short, he held the view that Christ did not assume a complete human nature, only a human body and what is strictly associated with the body, the sensitive soul.<sup>138</sup> In Mar Jacob's homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer* we have a passage that refutes Apollinarianism:

He fashions and seals rational images within wombs  
but He casts in His mother a corporeal image for His  
concealed being.

He casts the imprints of rationality in women  
but He rears for himself an animated body in Mary.  
He fashions and erects images of man in secrecy,  
but He fashions himself to become a man from a daughter of  
man.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> M. Hansbury, "Nature as Soteric: Syriac and Buddhist Traditions", in *ARAM* 5 (1993), 212.

<sup>136</sup> T. Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople", 26.

<sup>137</sup> F. Chiovaro, "Apollinarianism", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, 665.

<sup>138</sup> F. Chiovaro, "Apollinarianism", 666.

<sup>139</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 62.

In a homily *On Melchizedek*, Mar Jacob explained how Melchizedek foreshadows our Lord, who unlike the Levites who offered the blood of animals, “offered *Himself* for an oblation.” It does not seem that it is by chance that he qualifies the humanity of Christ by saying that He offered His “rational, soul-endowed Body”, but rejecting every stance that derogated the full humanity of Christ. We quote the text here:

He offered Himself, so that with the offering of His own  
 Person,  
 He might enter the Holy of Holies that none save He  
 entered.  
 Being High Priest, He brought Himself into the place of  
 propitiation,  
 Rather than offering dead flesh as did the Levites.  
 His own *rational, soul-endowed Body* He placed upon the  
 altar,  
 That It might be Show-bread to the Father in behalf of  
 reconciliation.<sup>140</sup>

In emphasizing that instead of the blood of the animals, Christ offered His full human life, Mar Jacob has explained the mystery of salvation. In order to provide for all men and women the possibility of restoring their fullness in Himself Christ became man.<sup>141</sup> And to use the famous expression of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, “what is not assumed is not healed, and what is united to God is saved.”<sup>142</sup>

Mar Jacob also speaks against the docetic heresy in his homilies. Docetism holds that Christ did not have a true body, but only a bodily appearance. About the birth of Christ the docetists

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<sup>140</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God, and on Types of our Lord”, *HS* V, 154-180; ET from HTM, *TV* 2 (1989), 36-37. [My italics]

<sup>141</sup> In order to explain this J. Meyendorff uses the terminology of St. Paul. He writes: “He became indeed, the “new Adam,” in whom every man finds his own nature realized perfectly and fully, without the limitations which would have been inevitable if Jesus were only a human personality.” J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 159.

<sup>142</sup> Gregory Of Nazianzus, *Letter 101 to Cledonius*, PG 37:181c-184 A. ET in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 160.



teach that He “passed through Mary just as water passes through a tube.”<sup>143</sup> According to A. Humbert, this heresy rises “from diverse causes such as the opinion current in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that material in itself is evil; or the scandal given by the bodily weakness exhibited by Christ while on earth, and more particularly his ignominious death on the cross.”<sup>144</sup> In exposing the different heresies which depreciate the divine maternity of Mary Mar Jacob also refers to docetism in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*.

Another fool, who is neither a Jew nor a pagan,  
talks idly about her, that the body of the Son is not from  
her.<sup>145</sup>

The docetists held the view that Jesus had an apparent body and was not formed from Mary. C. Vona notes that such a distinction between Christ and Jesus would lead to the conclusion that Mary neither generated the body of Jesus nor can Mary be called the mother of the Incarnated Word.<sup>146</sup>

Mar Jacob speaks not only against the heretical tendencies among the Christians, but against the Jews and pagans also. The Jews deny the divinity of Jesus Christ because according to them He is not the Son of God. They also deny the divine maternity of Mary for they consider that Christ was generated by a human father. There is evidence in the Gospel from which we understand that the Jews considered Jesus as the natural son of Joseph and Mary (Lk 4:22).

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<sup>143</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book I, VII, 2, 39.

<sup>144</sup> A. Humbert, “Docetism”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, 934.

<sup>145</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>146</sup> C. Vona, “Omellerie Mariologiche di Giacomo di Sarug, introduzione e traduzione dal Siriaco e commento”, in *Lateranum* 19 (1953), 40. D. J. Unjer in studying the exponents of docetism concludes that according to them Christ has received nothing from Mary: “Valentinus, Basilides Bardesanes and others admitted the conception and birth from the Virgin but said that the Word passed through her as through a channel and took nothing from her, as he was a man only in appearance.” D. J. Unjer, in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book 1, “Notes”, 170.



The Jews calumniate her Child (saying) that (He) is not  
 from the Father,  
 neither did she conceive nor did she give birth in her  
 virginity.<sup>147</sup>

Mar Jacob finds fault with the Jews for having ignored Isaiah, their own prophet who foretold the virginal birth of the Messiah:

The Jew is despised by Isaiah, the son of his people,  
 who preached that: "the virgin will give birth without  
 union."<sup>148</sup>

Just as the Jews do not believe in the Son of God, there is another group; the pagans who do not know about the miraculous nativity of the Son of God. Mar Jacob's wish and prayer is that all would come to the knowledge of God and embrace salvation achieved in Christ. We quote below four citations from the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*.

The pagan who is far (says) neither did she give birth nor  
 that she exists,  
 he does not even know that the blessed woman has a Son.<sup>149</sup>

Mary is calumniated by those who are far and near,  
 and her homily is swallowed up by the Jews and pagans.<sup>150</sup>

Rebuke the Jews and reprove the gentiles and unite the  
 dissidents  
 curb the controversies and drive away scandals from the  
 presumptuous ones.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>148</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iv-v.

<sup>149</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>150</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>151</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iv.

The pagan will learn from the regions and confines of the  
earth,  
because wherever he goes, behold, the Son of the Virgin  
will be spoken about.  
Another one foolishly says that she has not given birth to  
God in wonder,  
the Church makes her voice respond with anathema that he  
will not enter in her.  
And as for the fool who denies that the body of the Son was  
from her,  
she also hates him and his teaching and flees away from  
him.<sup>152</sup>

In his homily "On the Spectacles of the Theatre", Mar Jacob vehemently opposes amusements since they come from paganism. According to Mar Jacob this is what the actor in such plays does:

He mimes the stories of the gods, and burns perfumes at the plays, in order that he may do great honour to tales which are true for him. And if this be not so, why then does he burn incense at that time to the Fortune of anything? And all this pertains to paganism. Lo, I have shown you through deeds, while I have not wronged truth, that Satan wishes to set up paganism by means of the play.<sup>153</sup>

C. Moss, in introducing Mar Jacob's homilies "On the Spectacles" writes that it cannot be lawful for a Christian to be present at such spectacles and one's appearance at these plays is "a tacit admission of the truth of paganism."<sup>154</sup> If one were to defend one's interest in the spectacles saying that "I know that the mimings which belong to the spectacle are false. I do not go that I may believe, but I go that I may laugh", this is how Mar Jacob would respond:

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<sup>152</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, v.

<sup>153</sup> c. moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre", 106.

<sup>154</sup> C. Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre", 90.

The mimer of the spectacles meditates on the stories of the gods. Who can bathe in mud without being soiled? He mimes (stories) about the goddesses; he does not depart from (i.e. he cannot tear himself away from) the tales concerning them. And how then can he not be alienated from this party of the house of Jesus? Ye are the assembly of the baptised, whose husband and God is Jesus; and how will he not become jealous, since ye praise idols?<sup>155</sup>

Mar Jacob considers those who doubt the miraculous birth of the Son of God as having a sickness; and in fact he calls it an ulcer.

If you know God as who God is,  
it is easy for you to see that the womb is preserved in  
virginity.  
And if doubt, a hidden ulcer, has sprung up in your soul,  
it is difficult for you to believe that virginity remained in its  
place.<sup>156</sup>

In the concluding session of his homily *On the Presentation of Our Lord* he makes a prayer to Christ that the Church be deprived of strife, by this he might probably be referring to the diverse disputes in the Church.

O Christ, who came and proclaimed liberation to those who  
were bound prisoners,  
let loose from your Church the *grievous knots of strife*.  
O Son of God, who gladdened Simeon by His birth,  
make us all rejoice in the good hope of faith in you.<sup>157</sup>

In denouncing the heresies and Jewish-pagan stance towards the mystery of the Incarnation, Mar Jacob teaches about Christ's integral divine nature and perfect human nature. He distinguishes between the eternal generation of the Word from the Father and the

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<sup>155</sup> C. Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre", 109.

<sup>156</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xi.

<sup>157</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 158.



temporal generation from Mary, both are beyond explanation. The term "Jesus Christ" signifies both these generations.

## 5.2. Syriac Tradition

Mar Jacob was a true disciple of the Syriac tradition. He had studied at the school of Edessa<sup>158</sup> and inherited the symbolic-poetic methodology. Concerning his roots in the Syriac tradition we read in the introduction to the translation work done by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery: "In imagery, interpretation, and a typological approach to Scripture, Mar Jacob is a faithful disciple of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, his predecessor by some seventy years, to whom he devoted a panegyric that has survived."<sup>159</sup> T. Finn points out three characteristics of Ancient Syrian Christianity: 1) an enthusiasm for asceticism, which was propagated by a "dedication to a life of celibacy and, for the married, renunciation of sexual relations", 2) symbolic poetry and 3) the role of the Holy Spirit.<sup>160</sup> These characteristics are prevalent in Mar Jacob's writings. We pick up three strands for the first characteristic, one from his homily *On the Annunciation*:

The pure virgin and the just man with the same intention  
for they made holiness the marriage agreement.  
The chief of the angels was mediator and deemed them  
worthy  
that they might dwell like angels without marital union.  
In virginity and in purity and in holiness,  
They persevered in a marriage full of holy things.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> T. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism at the Catechumenate: West and East*, 188.

<sup>159</sup> "Introduction" to the translation in Jacob of Serugh, "The Second Homily on Elissaues and on the King of Moab Who Sacrificed His Son on the Wall", 52. All readers of Jacob acknowledge the fact that Jacob was inspired by Ephrem and his heirs. T. Finn traces St. Ephrem's poetic catechetical method i.e., instructional hymns (*madrashe*) and metrical homilies (*memre*) back to Bardaisan and Mani. T. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism at the Catechumenate: West and East*, 151.

<sup>160</sup> T. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism at the Catechumenate: West and East*, 112-114.

<sup>161</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 60.

Secondly, Mar Jacob's homilies "On the Spectacles of the Theatre" reflect his attitude towards continence which is an essential element of asceticism.

Love not *dancing*, the mother of all lasciviousness; understand it, how and what it is when thou dost investigate it. It is a great fountain of mockery which every day vomits forth spectacles; a spring of licentiousness which flows that it may give drink to worthless fellows. (It is) a sport which encourages children to forget admonition; a net which ensnares boys in the ways of a vicious life. It is a disordered foster-mother who teaches her sons to commit fornication; a teacher who instructs her pupils in the stories of idols. [...] It is the threshold of the house of the left which fights against the right; it is the bringer of zeal for idols, because it mimes their heroic actes. (It is) a sport which introduces paganism by means of lying stories, an inciter to hateful deeds by reason of these its licentious gestures [...] <sup>162</sup>

The third reference is from his homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*:

Joseph led the believing woman and she entered with him, and the virgin lived with the holy man in *continence*. <sup>163</sup>

Quite often in this thesis we refer to the second characteristic and deal with the third characteristic in the second and third chapters, so we will dispense with a lengthy elaboration here. Briefly, Mar Jacob inherits the Semitic approach from the tradition in which he was born and brought up.

### 5.3. The Influence of the Greek Fathers

At the time when Mar Jacob was in the School of Edessa, the works of the Greek Fathers had not been taught in their original language, but in Syriac. He knew Greek although he had not

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<sup>162</sup> C. Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre", 105-106.

<sup>163</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 75.

written anything in Greek. The works of the Greek Fathers, at least by way of translation, had a good influence upon Mar Jacob. We may reasonably assume that Mar Jacob's reference to "ten mortal senses" is the result of such an influence. The passage appears in his homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*:

Son, who firmly fixed ten mortal senses in the mortal body,  
stay my thoughts and bring them to the place of your  
Father.<sup>164</sup>

T. Spidlik has already brought to light the adherence of the spiritual senses to Greek Fathers. He writes that "The Doctrine of the Spiritual senses goes back to Origen."<sup>165</sup> The number "ten" has the significance of perfection and totality, for example ten commandments were given to the chosen people for eternal life.

Besides being influenced by the Greek Fathers, Mar Jacob was influenced by the Greek dogmatic position. According to T. Jansma Mar Jacob belonged to "two worlds": the Syriac and the Greek world.<sup>166</sup> Like most Syro-Antiochene theologians, Mar Jacob inherited the hellenistic and Semitic Aramaic culture. Their philosophy is Greek, but their theology is Semitic and biblical. Their intellectual formation was also influenced by this geographical cultural proximity with the Hellenistic world. That is why there is a mixture of hellenistic and Semitic elements in their writings.<sup>167</sup> S. Brock also has mentioned that the writers of the fifth and sixth centuries deemed Greek more prestigious and there is a fusion of Greek and native Syriac elements in their works. He

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<sup>164</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 89.

<sup>165</sup> Evagrius would deal with many senses from which the most excellent is spiritual sight. T. Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, ET by A. P. Gythiel, Kalamazoo, 1986, 94.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, "Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug", in *OrSyr* 10 (1965), 350.

<sup>167</sup> This information has been give by S. Jammo in a personal colloquy with the author in March, 2001.



added that the Semitic pole is still very prominent in the poet Jacob of Serugh.<sup>168</sup>

In Mar Jacob the confrontation is also in the philosophical perspective. Since the philosophic method cannot explain away the mystery of Mary, he tried to deal with the issue through a biblical and poetical style. In the philosophic perspective the mystery of Mary is a problem: “She is virgin and mother and wife of a husband yet unmated.”<sup>169</sup> How can one at the same time be virgin and mother? Mary is virgin and mother at the same time. In the philosophical perspective it is not possible to speak about this phenomenon. Therefore he changes his approach from Hellenistic precision to Syriac poetry, saying that love moves me to speak. It (love) “is proper” and “its way is pleasing and enriches the one who hears it.”<sup>170</sup>

#### 5.4. The Influence of the Apocryphal Writings

A reader of Jacob’s works can understand the influence of the apocryphal writings in Mar Jacob. It can even be suggested that there is a scope for research in this topic. The influence of the apocryphal writings is evident in his homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*. We will deal with this topic in the fifth chapter.

Another apocryphal influence on Mar Jacob is the identification of Zechariah as the high priest, which can probably be traced back to the *Protoevangelium of James*.<sup>171</sup> The Lucan narrative does not qualify Zechariah as the high priest, but says that “there was a priest named Zechariah” (Lk 1: 5). But Mar Jacob

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<sup>168</sup> S. Brock, “The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition”, in *Homage to Mar Cariattil: Pioneer Malabar Ecumenist*, ed., C. Payngot, Rome, 1987, 59.

<sup>169</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 21.

<sup>170</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 21.

<sup>171</sup> S. Brock, “Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis: Some Remarks on the Term *Aggen* in the Syriac Versions of Lk 1:35”, in *Novum Testamentum* 24 (1982), 223. S. Brock in this article writes that “The oldest manuscripts of *Protoevangelium of James* do not call Zachariah “high priest.” However, he opines that the implication is that he was indeed the high priest.

calls him the “high priest.”<sup>172</sup> Another example of the apocryphal influence is his metrical homily *On St. Thomas the Apostle of India*. This is a dramatic trilogy on the Apostle St. Thomas. G. Panicker stated that Mar Jacob seems to have been influenced by the *Acts of Thomas*.<sup>173</sup> The first and second poems are based on the first *Act of Judas Thomas* and describe how our Lord sold St. Thomas to the merchant Habban that he might go and convert India.<sup>174</sup> The third poem is based on the second Act of Judas Thomas which describes how Thomas entered India and built a palace for the King in heaven.

The influence of the apocryphal works on Mar Jacob is not just diffusive in the *mêmrê* مَعمَرَة, but is evident in his Mariological thoughts. The belief about Mary's *virginity in partu* seems to have been influenced by the apocryphal writings and especially by the *Ascension of Isaiah*. As J. N. D. Kelly says “in the *Ascension of Isaiah* we find the earliest affirmation of the belief that she was a virgin not only in conceiving Jesus but also in bearing Him (‘virginity in partu’): her womb was found as it was before she became pregnant.”<sup>175</sup> Briefly, the apocryphal works had a great influence on Mar Jacob.

## 6. Jacob's Christology

Mar Jacob's Christological perspective is soteriological; based on the understanding that man created by God has failed to live up to the fullness and so God became man in order to repair the corruption which happened to humanity. In the homily *On the Friday of Passion* he writes: “The Rich One repaid the debt of the poor and torn (sic. tore) up the bill (of debt) which all generations have not succeeded in repaying. The crucified One renewed creation by His passions and rebuilt an incorruptible world by His

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<sup>172</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 54.

<sup>173</sup> G. Panicker, “St. Thomas in India According to Jacob of Sarug”, in *The Harp* 2:1 (1989), 60.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. *The Acts of Thomas*, ed., A. J. F. Klijn, Leiden, 1962, 65-79.

<sup>175</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London, 1993, 494.

afflictions.”<sup>176</sup> As we have mentioned earlier, Mar Jacob did not accept the Chalcedon position because according to him the faith of Nicea and Constantinople was sufficient for salvation<sup>177</sup> and because he considered Chalcedon as a return to Nestorianism.<sup>178</sup> The Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries centred upon defining the relations between the divine and human natures of Christ. Using the imagery of leaven Mar Jacob explains how God became one with humanity in order to raise the race of humans to children of God.

Now, the procedure for leaven is as follows:

When it is mixed in for the dough to be prepared, it utterly  
perishes,

Deteriorating into dust, diminishing, disappearing, as  
though it were ceasing to be,

As if it came to nought, as if, having crumbled apart, it were  
no more;

Neither its form nor its fragrance nor its taste

Is recognized when it is kneaded in and its history comes to  
an end.

They bury it out of sight, then they bide their time waiting  
for it.

It enters and lies in wait, unrecognized within the lump;

It dissolves itself and is distributed therein, and becomes  
part of it;

It loses its taste so that all of the *lump* might be restored  
while the leaven itself perishes:

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<sup>176</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 291.

<sup>177</sup> B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l'anthropologie*, 56.

<sup>178</sup> The fifth-sixth century marks a period of struggle fight between the Monophysites and the Nestorians. J. Meyendorff, referring to both groups' lineage writes: Just as the "old Nicaeans" in the fourth century had refused to accept the formula of the three hypostaseis introduced by the Cappadocian Fathers because Athanasius had not used it, so the leaders of the fifth-sixth century Monophysitism-Dioscorus of Alexandria, Philoxenus of Mabbugh, and the great Severus of Antioch rejected the Council of Chalcedon and the Christological formula of "one hypostasis in two natures" because Cyril had never used it, and because they interpreted it as a return to Nestorianism." J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 34.





later tradition would have him to be, it is inconceivable that his co-religionists should have left the famous poet in the rank of a perideutes throughout the years of the governments of Zeno and Anastasius, and that he should have been made a bishop, at the age of 68, in the very days when Justin, breaking with the religious policy of his predecessors, brought about a revolution in favour of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>182</sup>

Emperors with different religious stances ruled the Roman Empire during Jacob's tenure as Chorbishop. Leo I was a pro-Chalcedonian (457-474), Zeno (474-491) formulated the Christological formula "*Henoticon*" in order to bring the Miaphysites and the Chalcedonians into an agreement, Anastasius I (491-518) supported the Miaphysites and Justin I (518-527) was a pro-Chalcedonian who wanted to destroy the Miaphysite hierarchy and build up a Chalcedonian hierarchy.<sup>183</sup> The time of Jacob's election to the episcopacy was not a favourable time for the Miaphysites. F. Graffin remarks that Jacob was nominated Bishop of Batnan, in the district of Serugh at a time when Jacob's friends Severus, Philoxenus and John of Tella had been exiled.<sup>184</sup> There were two options before Bishop Paul: either to accept the four Councils or to abdicate.<sup>185</sup> Mar Jacob spoke against the Council of Chalcedon and had a nostalgia for the unity of the preceding century. The events such as his long tenure in office as Chorbishop and his election to the episcopate at the age of 68 when Justin I, a strong exponent of the pro-Chalcedonians ruled the Roman empire lead us not to label this peace-loving Father of the Church with the so-called "Monophysitism" or "Miaphysitism." Regarding the theological position of Mar Jacob, T. Jansma writes:

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<sup>182</sup> T. Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople", 19.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. T. Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 7.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. F. Graffin, "Jacques de Saroug", 56. There are contradictory opinions about Mar Jacob's nomination to the episcopacy. For the details, see T. Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 4.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople", 30.



This man, who was born too late and who, wherever and whenever possible did his utmost to keep away from the conflict which had arisen between Alexandrian and western Christology, is full of nostalgia for the unity of the preceding century. His list of Oecumenical Councils contains only two names: Nicea and Constantinople. Hence, the confusion among the orientalist, who – in this case only to some extent with good reason – approached Jacob's work with the conception of his own age. This accounts at the same time for the fact that two rival parties are involved in such fierce contest over the right to his person. If the Monophysites revere him as their saint, they do so-as we have seen- on grounds, in spite of the fulminations of the abbot of Mar Bassus (On this point we can endorse the view of Dr. Krüger). And if, beginning with Timotheus Constantinopolitanus in the early seventh Century, Catholic authors regard him as one of their number, they too in a sense are entitled to do so. In a sense: for Jacob in his Christology has not written a single positive word that is not to be found in Cyril of Alexandria as well. But whereas Divine grace allowed the latter to die before 451, it fell to the lot of the former to be born in the very year in which the Council met, whose formula was henceforth to be the touchstone of the orthodox creed.<sup>186</sup>

To conclude our discussion concerning the Christological position of Jacob of Serugh, we would quote here T. Kollamparampil's findings. He writes: "Based on a pre-Chalcedonian as well as a 'pre-Nestorian' development of dogma, Jacob has a dogmatic position in Christology composed of Ephrem's symbolic-mystical vision of the mystery of Christ and the Cyrilline vision of the unity in Christ."<sup>187</sup>

## 7. Jacob: Interpreter of the Holy Scripture

When we start reading the works of Mar Jacob we will see how well versed he was in the Scripture. He was well known in the Syriac tradition as *malpono*, مَلْحَنَّا (teacher). His depth in the

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<sup>186</sup> T. Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicea and Constantinople", 32-33.

<sup>187</sup> T. Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 13.



Scripture and his service as a teacher are referred to in an eleventh century panegyric on Mar Jacob:

This is he who has drunk from the blessed spring of Eden, and then gave others to drink as it is written: This is he from whose lips living waters have streamed, and the church of the Son draws from them at all times. This is he from whose insight abundant streams have gushed, which delight the flock of the Son who had died for it.<sup>188</sup>

As a teacher of Holy Scripture what would have been Mar Jacob's source? Mar Jacob primarily used the text of Peshitta. R. H. Connolly<sup>189</sup> and M. Black<sup>190</sup> in their studies have shown that Mar Jacob made use of the *Diatessaron* also. Below we quote M. Black:

- (a) Jacob of Serug *expressly* quotes the *Diatessaron* by name as 'the Gospel', and probably gives us, at least once, a sample of the Syriac Harmony, He [sic. he] is also almost certainly drawing on it freely elsewhere.
- (b) At the same time, there cannot be the least doubt that Jacob's basic text and his authoritative Version [sic. version] is the Syriac Vulgate; about 60 per cent of the quotations examined agree practically *verbatim* with our Peshitta.<sup>191</sup>

Mar Jacob's exegetical method is closely linked with his approach to the divine mystery and his symbolic theology. As a necessary condition for receiving the true and deeper meaning of the Holy Scripture, Jacob of Serugh demands love, the soul's inclination to God and its abandoning earthly things.<sup>192</sup> In his

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<sup>188</sup> A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 120.

<sup>189</sup> R. H. Connolly, "Jacob of Sarug and the *Diatessaron*", 581-591.

<sup>190</sup> M. Black, "The Gospel Text of Jacob of Serug", in *JTS* 2 (1891), 57-63.

<sup>191</sup> M. Black, "The Gospel Text of Jacob of Serug", 63.

<sup>192</sup> This aspect appears in almost all the homilies in multifarious expressions; sometimes it is the love of God and sometimes loving devotion to the subject, which are demanded from the preacher as well as from the listeners.

homily *On the Sunday of Hosannas* there is an important passage about humility as a prerequisite to see the beauty of the Scripture:

Therefore, regarding the scriptures which are full of humility, let us not read as long as pride is within us. For, unless the soul dive into it with humility lower down than the dust, the beauty of the Scripture will not be seen by it because its beauty is there where its humility is seen.<sup>193</sup>

It is particularly emphasized in several passages in the homilies that faith is indispensable for understanding the Holy Scripture correctly.<sup>194</sup> The attitude of the faithful must not be an investigation but an openness to the Lord that He might come and dwell in us; to quote Mar Jacob's words: "Open the gate of your mind (*hawnâ*) to the miracle, that he may dwell in you when you are perfect as he dwelt in the womb of the virgin when she was sealed up."<sup>195</sup> Mar Jacob in giving importance to the moral and theological meaning in his exegesis, compares the Scripture to a "lamp", perhaps inspired by the Psalmic verse: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119: 105).

God has placed the Scriptures in the world like lamps of  
great light  
In the midst of darkness, for the world to be lightened by  
them;  
The soul of him that has love receives light from the  
readings,

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<sup>193</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Sunday of Hosannas*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 263.

<sup>194</sup> J. Zingerle points this out as a special characteristic of Mar Jacob's methodology in interpreting the Scriptures. "In der Rede über den Wagen des Ezeziel sind es die Liebe, der Glaube und das Vertrauen, in Kraft deren er den erhabenen Gegenstand zu besprechen sich anschickt." J. Zingerle, "Eine ungedruckte Homilie Jakobs von Sarug übersetzt und erklärt, (Über Jakob von Sarug und seine Typologie)", 107.

<sup>195</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae quotquot supersunt I. Sarugensis*, 20, ET by R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, Oxford, 1976, 118.

And he walks through their realms as in broad daylight.<sup>196</sup>

The preacher and the listener approach the Word of God for a purpose, to use his own expression, for “profit.” In order to get the profit one has to approach the Scripture with love, for “love is the door whereby one enters in unto the meaning.”<sup>197</sup> To the one who loves the Word, the Scripture will array all treasures before that person. The profit that it offers is the “illumination of the intellect.”

Love, therefore, must impel him that approaches the  
 readings,  
 And then his intellect will be enriched by the meaning.<sup>198</sup>

Mar Jacob is following a Christ-oriented typological interpretation of the Old Testament. According to him, the Bible is like an ocean where you find pearls; and the duty of the commentator is to plunge into it for the mines.<sup>199</sup> As J. Zingerle has clearly pointed out, according to Jacob’s description, the whole Old Testament is permeated by a mysterious type-forming power which is also conceived as personifying type and which leads everything to the one goal: Christ and the Church that cannot be separated from Him.<sup>200</sup> As a pupil of the School of Edessa he is following the Antiochian hermeneutics and his exegetical rule is “that no scriptural text can be understood divorced from its context and without its historical background.”<sup>201</sup> He is following both

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<sup>196</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “The Second Homily on the Elissaeus and on the King of Moab who sacrificed his Son on the Wall”, ET from HTM, 55.

<sup>197</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “The Second Homily on the Elissaeus and on the King of Moab who sacrificed his Son on the Wall”, ET from HTM, 55.

<sup>198</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “The Second Homily on the Elissaeus and on the King of Moab who sacrificed his Son on the Wall”, ET from HTM, 55-56.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. B.P. Sony, “La méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug”, 91.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. J. Zingerle, “Über Jakob von Sarug und seine Typologie”, 98.

<sup>201</sup> T. Jansma, “The Credo of Jacob of Serugh: A Return to Nicaea and Constantinople”, 29. S. Brock points out Mar Jacob’s allegiance to the Antiochene school in following a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:2 about the action of the *ruha d-alaha* upon the primordial waters as ‘the *ruha* (spirit/wind) is created, and not the Holy (Spirit), as has been thought.’ This interpretation is exceptional among Syrian Orthodox writers. Cf. S. Brock, “Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh”, 340.



typological and spiritual exegesis. In this exegesis Mar Jacob is trying to see Christ in every event of the Scripture. For example, in the riddle of Samson, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet" (Judg 14:14), there is apparently nothing more to interpret than what is explained in verse 18. But Mar Jacob finds in it a type of a great mystery: "a revelation came upon the Nazirite", he slew the lion and found honey, but he did not know what the mystery of the lion and the honey meant until Christ came to the world. It is relevant to quote a part of his homily *On Samson* here:

Bitter is death, and our Lord is sweet honey,  
And it manifestly came to pass that the Sweet came out of  
the bitter.

Death is the eater that ate all generations,  
And from it came forth Christ, as Bread for the world to eat.  
Here it was fulfilled that the eatable came forth from the  
eater,

But at that time who knew to interpret these things?  
Not even did Samson, who made the riddle with the lion  
that he killed,

Understand the hidden mystery brought to pass.  
Until the light, even our Lord, rose upon His creatures,  
The buried treasure of these mysteries was not uncovered.

For if mysteries of our Lord were not found in Samson,  
Neither would his birth have been heralded by an angel.

The type of the Son was announced by an angel,  
And because of Him, revelations were given at sundry  
times.

Every one whose lot it has been to escort the procession of  
the Son of God

Hath been honoured with revelations and with visitations of  
angels.

Fair was Samson when he portrayed the type of the  
 Messiah,  
 And made the riddle that the sweet came out of the bitter.  
 Our Lord, the Word, is sweeter to the mouth than honey,  
 The sweet taste that hath sweetened the bitterness of the  
 whole world.<sup>202</sup>

In dwelling upon a small Old Testament episode Mar Jacob has been able to see the different aspects of the mystery of the Son of God, such as the resurrection from the dead, the Annunciation of His birth through an angel and the believer's reception of Christ in the Eucharist. This does not mean that one can understand the meaning and implication of every text of the Holy Scriptures. This leaves room to admit human limitations. For example, concerning Samson's entry into the house of the harlot, (Judg 16:1-3) Mar Jacob asks "Why did the Lord's Nazirite go in unto the harlot? His tale confuses me, and I know not what to say of it."<sup>203</sup>

Along with the spiritual meaning of the text, Mar Jacob also gives its moral and theological implications. In interpreting Samson's visit to the prostitute in Ga'za, he says that "the mighty deeds that Samson wrought were God's but the others which were not good were his own." In the light of the "Lord's Nazirite's fall", as a teacher of the Scriptures and spiritual leader Mar Jacob instructs the believers in the tone of St. Paul who wrote, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

But how the Lord will judge the last judgement  
 Is not thine affair; weary not thyself with what concerns  
 thee not!  
 But perchance this also, *I mean* that Samson went down to  
 the harlot,

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<sup>202</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily On Samson", *HS* V, 331-355, ET from HTM, *TV* 11 (1992), 58.

<sup>203</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily On Samson", ET from HTM, 63.

Was suffered him by providence, that he might fall for thy  
sake,

To be for thee a mirror which revealeth blemishes,

That thou mightest see thyself and not fall as he fell.<sup>204</sup>

Mar Jacob also sees the type of Christ in Samson's departure from the harlot. In the book of Judges we read, "But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is before Hebron" (Judg 16:3).

He did not wish to open the gate and escape as fugitive,

But lifted them clean off as a man of great strength.<sup>205</sup>

This is how our exegete would see the type of Christ in this  
event.

Sheol is a harlot, and all generations were her men;

And she seized our Lord, that He should be with her like the  
rest.

So He went in, and slept, and the door of the tomb was shut  
upon Him,

And in their madness they stood guarding Him as they did  
Samson.

But the Saviour rose from the grave and broke down

All the bulwarks of Sheol as He departed, and they stood  
not before Him.

And this likeness brought Samson in unto the harlot,

For she too is a Sheol, being perdition to all that draw near  
her.

This type which was depicted in Samson gave him the  
strength

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<sup>204</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily On Samson", ET from HTM, 63.

<sup>205</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily On Samson", ET from HTM, 64.





The Scripture honored this priest in many ways,  
So that so far as is possible, he might resemble the Son of  
God.  
It skillfully (sic. skilfully) veiled his birth and death with  
silence,  
Lest he be spoken of with a littleness unbecoming to him.  
It stretched out his portrait to be greater than those subject  
to birth,  
That it might suffice to reach the summit of the fairness of  
the Son of God.  
Moses, this scribe that expounded genealogies,  
Passed over in silence the birth of this priest.  
He beheld his form, far too sublime for exposition,  
And did not dishonour him by associating his history with  
that of those subject to death.<sup>208</sup>

In concluding our views on Mar Jacob's exegesis, we would like to point out that his stance is awe-inspiring. After having given a profound meditative exposition on the mystery of Melchizedek, Mar Jacob was conscious of the rich significance of the Holy Scripture. We would recapitulate here the expressions that he used in the homily "On Melchizedek" in order to appreciate his exegesis.<sup>209</sup> Since the discourse on Melchizedek was too petty to describe his great tale, Mar Jacob says that he ought "to summon silence to overshadow his narration." Whenever "speech is unequal to tell some matter", "let it fill with silence the place of utterance that cannot be contained." He continues: "my silence about his greatness is part of the homily, for silence is suited to what is ineffable in this account." Another expression was "I am silent in order to marvel." "There is in his history that which cannot be told

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<sup>208</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily on Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God, and on Types of Our Lord", ET from HTM, 41.

<sup>209</sup> We extract these expressions from lines 403 –426 of "A Homily on Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God, and on Types of Our Lord", ET from HTM, 49-50.

except by silence.” He repeated that “the homily requires both speech that is straightforward and distinct, as well as silence filled with wonder at his greatness.” Mar Jacob in his attempt to prepare this homily seemed to agree with the saying: “that what is spoken is sweet and what is left unspoken is still sweeter”, for he says: “I had set out that I might speak to you even as ye have heard, But lo, I enter within his realm keeping silence.” As for the believer who listens to the Word of God, Mar Jacob consciously added that it was more important “to be filled with awe” than with “mere listening.”

## 8. Mariology

Syriac scholars, who from the time of J. S. Assemani<sup>210</sup> have dealt with Mar Jacob’s Mariological thoughts, have focused attention on his stance on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. In interpreting Mar Jacob’s expression that Mary was “without blemish”, C. Vona opines this way:

“Noi chiamiamo la Vergine, Immacolata, e diamo a tale termine un significato esteso, si da comprendere l’esclusione di ogni colpa sia originale che personale.[...] Nel contesto, in verità non si parla di peccato originale, ma, implicitamente, dalla dottrina del Sarugense sembra doversi escludere anche la colpa di origine.”<sup>211</sup>

When we read carefully the original text, we understand that an interpretation of this text in favour of Mary’s exclusion from original sin is not plausible. There is no ambiguity in the Syriac text in this respect. Mary is spoken of as humble, pure, limpid and “without blemish.”<sup>212</sup> It is the Syriac expression, *dlo mumo* ܕܠܐ ܡܡܘܡܐ, that is translated as *immacolata* in Italian and “without blemish” in English. J. Payne Smith gives the following meanings for *dlo mumo* ܕܠܐ ܡܡܘܡܐ: flawless, faultless and unblemished.<sup>213</sup> Hence the textual evidence is far from the truth in assuming even “implicitly” her

<sup>210</sup> J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis, Clementino-Vaticana*, Vol. I, Roma, 1719-1728, 286-289.

<sup>211</sup> C. Vona, “La dottrina di Giacomo di Sarug sulla santità di Maria”, in *Euntes Docete* 6 (1953), 36.

<sup>212</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. HANSBURY, 23.

<sup>213</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 258.



exception from original sin and the taking for granted that it corresponds to the concept of the Immaculate Conception.

A few scholars in their studies have tackled the theme of Mary's sanctity<sup>214</sup> and her birth pangs.<sup>215</sup> P. Krüger has dealt with the question of Mary's birthpangs in Mar Jacob's writings, so as to judge if Jacob is a Catholic or not.<sup>216</sup> Although such studies have been done to weigh him in the light of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, little attention was paid to Mar Jacob's poetic and symbolic methodology towards understanding his Mariological thoughts. Therefore, in our study we will make an attempt to understand what Mar Jacob meant by his symbolic expressions pertaining to the mystery of Mary.

## Conclusion

I have been trying to study Mar Jacob's approach to divine mystery as seen in his metric homilies. I will delineate them as follows: 1) Mar Jacob's approach to the divine mystery led him to adapt symbolic theology. The advantage of his symbolic theology was that it safeguarded the "mystery" nature of God and enabled the reader to enter into and experience the divine mystery. I consider this as the fruit of his deep God-experience and his wisdom in the Holy Scripture. Since God cannot be contained by anyone and since ordinary language is incapable of communicating divine mystery, Mar Jacob resorted to symbolic-poetic language. He used different figures of speech and employed biblical and natural symbols for this methodology.

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<sup>214</sup> Cf. C. Vona, "La dottrina di Giacomo di Sarug sulla santità di Maria", 30-48; A. V. Roey, "La sainteté Marie d'après Jacques de saroug", in *Ethl* 31 (1955), 46-62.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. C. Vona, "Maria e i dolori del parto nel pensiero di Giacomo di Sarug", in *Euntes. Docete* 3 (1950), 254-257.

<sup>216</sup> P. Krüger writes: "[...] Der Sachverhalt ist klar. Die gegenteiligen Meinungen sind zu gut belegt. Jakob selbst kann nicht zu gleicher Zeit beide Auffassungen vertreten haben. Die Anschauung, dass Maria *den Herrn ohne Schmerzen geboren hat, entspricht dem katholischen Dogma.*" P. Krüger, "Das Problem der Rechtgläubigkeit Jakobs von Serugh und seine Lösung", in *OS* 5 (1956), 240. [My Italics].

2) His Christology, I consider, is intrinsically related to soteriology. I believe that Mar Jacob cannot be simply labelled as Miaphysite or Monophysite. He always stood for the unity of the Church in the preceding century.

3) Among the factors that influenced him, I have pointed out his allegiance to the Syriac tradition, the influence of the Greek Fathers and Greek thought, and the influence of the apocryphal works. It has to be underlined that he was a faithful disciple of St. Ephrem, though he lived 75 years later than him.

4) Mar Jacob's exegetical method is typological and spiritual. In his interpretation, he tried to see the Old Testament events as types or prefigures of the mystery of Christ. In his exegesis, he gave importance to moral and theological exhortations. As a *malpono* ܡܠܦܢܐ (teacher) of the Bible, he consciously exhorted the believers, or anyone who was committed to the service of the Scripture for that matter, "to be filled with awe" rather than with "mere listening." It is hoped that what I have considered in this chapter will enable the reader to understand the Mariological symbols that Mar Jacob used. Thus, this chapter will serve as the background for my research scheme.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE DIVINE MOTHERHOOD OF MARY IN THE HOMILIES OF JACOB OF SERUGH

### Introduction

In this chapter I will indicate how Mar Jacob of Serugh treated the divine motherhood of Mary in his Mariological Homilies.<sup>1</sup> There are three aspects that we observe in his treatment of the motherhood of Mary: the first is that Christ, the Son of God dwelt in Mary; the second is that she conceived a child without a sexual relationship with a man, and the third is that in conceiving and giving birth she remained a virgin. To be a mother and a virgin at the same time is a contradiction in the natural order of things, and so this goes beyond our conception of motherhood.

Mar Jacob's concern in these homilies is to understand the mystery of Mary's virginal Motherhood. According to him what happened in Mary's life was the fulfilment of God's promises to His people, and the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. Therefore Mar Jacob made use of Old Testament symbols. This had a double advantage: 1) He could show that what happened in Mary was the fulfilment of what was prefigured in the Old Testament. His attempt was not to solve a problematic issue in the natural order but to enter into the mystery of salvation history. Here comes the purpose and point of the methodology of Mar Jacob which he adopted in his Mariological Homilies, 2) Since the use of ordinary human language was insufficient, the biblical symbols enabled him to enter into the mystery rather than to solve it. For him the mystery was not a problem to be solved but a way of experiencing God's presence.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 614-832.



I will analyse the biblical context of these symbols, study their meaning and see how they are applied in his homilies.<sup>2</sup> This will create an understanding of the theological significance of these symbols and arrive at Mar Jacob's understanding on Mary's motherhood. My purpose is neither to solve a problem nor to explain it away, but to approach the mystery itself.

The biblical symbols that I am going to study in this chapter are the Ark full of mysteries, the second heaven, the shining castle, the celestial chariot, the new well, the pure temple, the Tabernacle and the cloud of Mount Sinai. Since Mar Jacob considered Mary's motherhood as a 'mystery', it is important to look at Mar Jacob's conception of the 'mystery of Mary', and after briefly discussing this I will take up the symbols he used. First I will look into his conception of the mystery of Mary.

## 1. The Mystery of Mary

The Jews and heretics neither rightly understand Mary's conception,<sup>3</sup> nor know who is the father of the child in her womb. In his homilies, Mar Jacob affirmed the real motherhood of Mary and I will highlight the texts which support this. He says that Mary conceived Him,<sup>4</sup> carried Him nine months<sup>5</sup> and brought Him up with all the love and care of a natural mother.<sup>6</sup> So it becomes relevant to affirm that Mary was a real mother.

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<sup>2</sup> The biblical analysis of the symbol is given more importance, because it was his biblical scholarship that led him to make use of the symbols so well and Mar Jacob's title in the Church was as a teacher, *malpono* مَلْفَنَّا. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-dichtung des Jaqōb von Serug 1: Sammlungen: Die Handschriften*, CSCO 344, sub. 39, Louvain 1973, 1 n. 3; 5; 9.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, iii.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 80.

Our consideration upon the motherhood of Mary requires the analysis of the two Syriac words *b<sup>e</sup>ten* ܒܬܢ and *ýledh* ܝܠܕܗ which Jacob used to refer to Mary's motherhood. *B<sup>e</sup>ten* ܒܬܢ is used to explain that, when the Son of God came down to humanity, he was conceived by a virgin.<sup>7</sup> And *ýledh* ܝܠܕܗ means that 'she gave birth.'<sup>8</sup> Due importance was given to both the Holy Spirit and Mary in the formulation of the Nicean creed that Christ was "born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin" (*ethgašam men rūho qadišo wmen maryām b<sup>e</sup>tulto qādišto* ܐܬܗܓܫܡ ܡܢ ܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܡܢ ܡܪܝܡ ܒܬܠܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).<sup>9</sup> When dealing with Mary's conception and motherhood, it is to be noted that she conceived without a marital union (*lo zawgo* ܠܐ ܙܐܘܓܐ). *Zawgo* ܙܐܘܓܐ is the Syriac word for the marital union between husband and wife; and *lo zawgo* ܠܐ ܙܐܘܓܐ is the negation of it; this refers to the virginal maternity of Mary. Mar Jacob wrote in his homily *On the Virgin*: "She gave birth to a baby without her coming into the place of his father."<sup>10</sup> The expression 'without marital union' refers to the fact that Mary conceived the child through the action of the Holy Spirit. And so this event is in accordance with the angel's announcement that "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35).

In short, Mary's motherhood is a mystery because in our concept of motherhood, a mother ceases to be a virgin. But here Mary is a mother and a virgin at the same time. Although this seems to be a contradiction, it is a mystery for the believer. After this brief introduction to Mar Jacob's concept of the mystery of Mary, I now begin considering the various symbols.

## 2. Mary: The "Ark of the Covenant" (Aroono dāqyomo ܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ)

The first symbol I am going to consider, is the symbol of the "ark of the covenant" employed by Mar Jacob to refer to the

<sup>7</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 97.

<sup>9</sup> *Kthōbo dazlūtho šhīmtho*, Pampakuda, 1988, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, M. Hansbury, 20.



mystery of Mary's motherhood. The mystery of Mary's childbearing was not revealed to anybody, and yet Elizabeth came to know about this mystery and Mar Jacob says that she looked upon Mary as the ark of mysteries.

The Virgin abides like an ark full of mysteries;  
and the house of the priest rejoices, is merry, and honours  
her.<sup>11</sup>

The present thesis holds that the reason for Mary's joy is that she was filled with the divine presence just as the ark was filled with the glory of God. There are three particular references in Mar Jacob's homilies which support this argument. 1) Elizabeth realizes the dwelling presence of God in Mary saying, "The One who forms babes in all wombs dwells in you, Mary."<sup>12</sup> In the Old Testament when Uzziah put out his hand to take hold of the ark, God smote him and he died beside the ark of the covenant. On seeing this David was afraid of the Lord and he asked "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam 6:6-9). This is because he believed that God dwelt in the ark. In a similar way experiencing God's presence in Mary, Elizabeth asks "O virgin full of wonder, who grants me that you come to me."<sup>13</sup> 2) The second reference is closely connected to this story, the ark remained in the house of Obededom for three months (2 Sam 6:11). Mar Jacob applies this to Mary, "for three months she lived in the Levite's house,"<sup>14</sup> and "for three months the sublime and divine story was being told in the house of the priest on account of Mary."<sup>15</sup> 3) Mary brought forth blessings to the house of Elizabeth, when "He anointed the babe with the Holy Spirit in the womb of his mother."<sup>16</sup> The parallel texts we are discussing contain two sad and rather drastic incidents: the death of Uzziah (2 Sam 6:7), and the curse on Zechariah (Lk 1:20). Both texts immediately bring out incidents of blessing; "And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obededom the Gittite three

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 53.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 50.



months; and the Lord blessed Obbedom and his household” and God blessed Zechariah’s family because of Mary who visited them, which Mar Jacob presents as follows:

The son of God sent forth the Spirit from his essence,  
and the lad was baptized by the Holy Spirit while he was still  
in his mother’s womb.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.1. The “Ark of the Covenant” in the Bible

In the Old Testament, the ark was the receptacle for the tablets of the covenant. In the first description of the ark, God commanded Moses to put the testimony in the ark where God was to meet with the people (Ex 25:21).<sup>18</sup> In the Old Testament, the ark in which the Word of God was placed became the point of God’s meeting with his people.

It was Bezalel who constructed the ark according to the measurements and plan given by God (Ex 37:1-15). We read in the book of Exodus how the ark was to be made. It was to be made of acacia wood and it had to be covered with pure gold (Ex 25:10-11). On the top of the ark there was to be a covering made of pure gold. They were to make a mercy seat and place it on the top of the ark and the testimony was to be deposited in the ark. The cherubim were to be crafted; they were to face one another with their wings stretched (Ex 25:10-22).

The two materials chosen for the construction of the ark were: 1) acacia wood and 2) pure gold. 1) Acacia wood is significant because it is a wood that does not decay, for it has a capacity to resist moths and other elements of destruction. It is a wood that grows even in the desert. 2) Pure gold is to be used for covering the ark. Pure gold is purified in the fire seven times and so is without stain. So the materials used in the construction of the ark would tell

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 50.

<sup>18</sup> According to C. L. Seow, the ark was a *rendezvous* where God would meet the people. Cf. C. L. Seow, “Ark of the Covenant”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed., D. N. Freedman, Vol. I, New York, 1992, 392.

us something about the person of Mary, the ark in which the Incarnate God dwelt.

There can be two reasons why the presence of the ark was very important in the pilgrim life of the Israelites. The first reason is that it blessed them. At the time of crossing the river Jordan, when the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were dipped in the water, the water stopped flowing and the people passed over opposite Jericho (Josh 3:14-17). Joshua's reflection about this event is "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is might; that you may fear the Lord your God for ever" (Josh 4:24). If the presence of the ark was a blessing for Israel, it was a curse and destruction for the other nations who despised it. When the Philistines captured the ark of God and deposited it in their temple beside Dagon their god, the hand of the Lord was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and afflicted them with tumours (1 Sam 5:1-6). It is explained in the story of Israel itself that sacrilege is punishable by death. For example, Uzziah died when he put out his hand to the tottering ark and took hold of it (2 Sam 6:6-7). The second reason is that the ark was almost identified with God. The expression "before the Lord" or "before God" is used synonymously with "before the ark." When the cart carrying the ark of God was being driven to the city of David, David and all the house of Israel were making merry *before the Lord* with their songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals (2 Sam 6:4-5,14,16).

In the Old Testament, the ark was an important symbol signifying the presence of the Lord. Mar Jacob who had already admitted the insufficiency of human language<sup>19</sup> for the mystery of Mary, compared her to the ark of God. Just like the priests who carried the ark of the covenant in their journey towards the promised land, Mary carried God Himself who had come to save human kind.

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<sup>19</sup> The discourse concerning Mary is too exalted for man. Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. HANSBURY, 18.



## 2.2. Mary: The “Ark full of Mysteries” (aroono d’mle rozê ܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܡܠܐ ܪܘܙܐ)

The Syriac words that refer to the ark in the homilies of Mar Jacob are *aroono* and *qībūtho* ܩܝܒܘܬܗ. *Aroono* refers to the ark of the covenant.<sup>20</sup> *Qībūtho* ܩܝܒܘܬܗ is translated as the ark, and *qībūtho d’qyāmo* ܩܝܒܘܬܗ ܕܩܝܡܐ as the ark of the covenant.<sup>21</sup> Mary is the “ark of mysteries” in the sense that she is carrying the Son of God as a child who came into the world to save humanity. What is the mystery that is referred to here? In Syrian understanding, *rozo* ܪܘܙܐ, (plural *rozê* ܪܘܙܐ), means, ‘secret, mystery, symbol.’ The plural ‘*rozê*’ ܪܘܙܐ, i.e., mysteries, is the standard term in Syriac for the Eucharist.<sup>22</sup> The term ‘mysteries’ here refers to the event by which Jesus Christ was formed in the womb of Mary. The role that Mary played in His Incarnation cannot be explained in words, but could well be put into symbolic expressions such as ‘ark full of mysteries.’

He who recognizes that prophecy is veiled  
also recognizes that it is uncovered in the son of God-  
the hidden mystery which has revealed itself to the world in  
flesh:  
blessed is he who came and uncovered the prophets who had  
been veiled.<sup>23</sup>

How did Mar Jacob show that Mary is the “ark full of mysteries”? For him, this mystery consisted in that “she is virgin and mother and wife of a husband yet unmated”<sup>24</sup> and that “she has not been known by any mortal.”<sup>25</sup> This means that the maternity of Mary, and her other prerogatives were not independent of the mystery of Christ. Mar Jacob treated Mariology along with Christology. Mary’s acclamations and honour are seen as a result of her closer relationship with her Son. Yet, we must note that Mar

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 485.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 21.



Jacob, who speaks of Mary as the daughter of David, does not speak of a pre-election of Mary before time, but says that the Father sent the mystery of the Son to Mary.

No one but the Father perceived the mystery of the Son,  
and the Father sent it to the daughter of David by means of  
Gabriel.

Only Mary learned that hidden mystery,  
but she did not reveal to anyone what was spoken to her by the  
angel.<sup>26</sup>

Why does Mar Jacob call Mary the “ark full of mysteries”? He calls her so because “He dwelt in a spotless womb which was adorned with virginity.”<sup>27</sup> In the biblical analysis we have seen that for the construction of the ark of God rare and precious acacia wood and pure gold were chosen. Just as He chose these materials for the ark, He chose Mary, because she had been without any spot<sup>28</sup> and her character was excellent. Just like the gold which was devoid of stain, Mary is the maiden in whom there is no sin. She has been adorned with the virtue of virginity, which has been preserved in holiness. She is the purest and most worthy person in the whole of humanity, in whom the Son of God came to dwell. Yet she is part of humanity where a sinful condition prevails. Just as the acacia tree, which can grow even in the desert, Mary overcame the calumny of the people and stood firm in her commitment to God even when Joseph doubted her innocence. Thus Mary became the new ark in which the Son of God dwelt. The infinite God was present in the ark of the covenant, here in a similar way, the unlimited God “dwells in the womb of flesh.”<sup>29</sup> Mar Jacob exploited this symbolism very well in his homily. He changed the name of the symbol slightly and called Mary the “ark full of fire.”

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<sup>26</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 67.

### 2.3. Mary: The “Ark full of Fire” (qībūtho d’malyo nūro قَائِمًا وَمَلَأًا نَارًا)

Fire is a very rich symbol in the Old Testament, and it stands for the transcendence of God. Fire is a symbol which has an everlasting importance in religion. R. de Menezes, seeing the symbolic meaning of fire in both Testaments, has said that biblical revelation starts with God’s revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3:2) and ends with His revelation to the disciples of Jesus Christ in the upper room on Pentecost Day in the form of “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3) which descended on them.<sup>30</sup> The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel (Ex 24:16-17).

Why does Mar Jacob call Mary ‘the ark full of fire’? This is because the Lord who appeared as “fire” dwelt in Mary.

They looked on her as the habitation of the Godhead;  
And she was regarded by them as an ark full of fire.<sup>31</sup>

In the Old Testament the acceptance of sacrificial offerings was confirmed by the descent of fire upon it (1 Kings 18:38).<sup>32</sup> Fire is a symbol of the consecratory role of the Holy Spirit whose

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. R. De. Menezes, “Water and Fire”, in *The World as a Sacrament, Interdisciplinary Bridge -Building of the Sacred and the Secular*, eds., F. D'sa, et al., Pune, 1998, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, M. Hansbury, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Mar Ephrem in his commentary on the sacrifice of Abel and Cain said that fire did not touch the offering of Cain. “Cain became angry on account of the fire that had come down and distinguished between the offerings [...] Cain’s offering had been placed in the midst of the fire and yet the fire did not touch it.” Cf. Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, in *St. Ephrem the Syrian Selected Prose Works*, ed., K. Mcvey, Washington, 1994, 125. Although the expression “fire did not touch the offering” was not mentioned in Gen.4:4-5, Ephrem used it to refer to the acceptance of the sacrifice which means that it was already a standard expression in the Syriac tradition.

descent is invoked by the priest in the epiclesis.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Mar Jacob was drawing a parallel between the accepted sacrifices of the Old Testament and the accepted life of Mary. God distinguished between the sacrifices of Elijah and of Baal's prophets (1 Kings 18:22-39) and the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the offering of Elijah. In a similar way, God "observed" her and "saw that there was not like her nor equal to her in the world" and so, "He chose one for himself who among them all was pleasing."<sup>34</sup>

In his reference to Christ, Mar Jacob uses the expression "Coal of Fire", recalling the burning coal with which the lips of the prophet Isaiah were touched in order to make them clean (Is 6:6). Just as the Ark contained the presence of God, Mary became the dwelling place of the "Flame" whom the angels feared to look at.

The 'Coal of Fire' which the Seraph scarcely took hold of with  
the tongs of fire,  
behold, Joseph carries with his fingers.<sup>35</sup>

It is the greatness of the mystery of the Son of God that Mar Jacob wants to illustrate by referring to the "Coal of Fire" and the "Flame." He marvels at the nativity of the Son of the Most high and speaks of Him as "the Flame inside the swaddling clothes that had come to burn up the thorns of the earth from all quarters."<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3.1. Mary and the Symbol of Fire that Burns up the Thorns of Sin

Mar Jacob makes good use of this typology by speaking of Christ as the "flame" that had come to burn away the thorns and thistles of the earth. He developed the theme of Jesus as the purifying light in his homily *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. Brock, "Fire from Heaven: From Abel's Sacrifice to the Eucharist, A Theme in Syriac Christianity", in *StPat* 25 (1993), 229-243.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 118.

<sup>37</sup> The Syriac tradition, in the context of Christian baptism, applies this typology and speaks of the consecration of the baptismal water by Christ as



The Holy One came, and reached the waters to descend to be  
baptized,  
and His Fire kindles among the waves and inflamed them.<sup>38</sup>

Christ is the fire that came to burn up “the briars and thorns”<sup>39</sup>  
(*ya’re wkube* ܝܥܪܝܐ ܠܬܝܢܝܐ) of the earth. “Briars and thorns” represent  
the sin that came upon the earth as a consequence of the  
disobedience of Adam. God said: “cursed is the ground because of  
you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and  
thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the  
field” (Gen 3:17-18).

A Flame dwells in your blessed womb,  
and even the Seraphim are shaken if they look at it.  
The living Flame and the kindler of worlds is silent in you,  
that Flame which purifies the thorns of false worship when it  
is uncovered.

That Flame which kindled the world, fills your womb;  
the thorns which are planted in all the earth are consumed by  
it.<sup>40</sup>

Adam’s violation of the commandments led humankind to  
alienation, and the whole earth became the dominion of the evil one.  
This is symbolised by the expression “the whole earth has been  
rooted by the thorns.” Mar Jacob presents Christ as the Redeemer  
and the Saviour of the world when he says that the flame which fills  
Mary’s womb would consume the thorns of the earth.<sup>41</sup> At the

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He came to Jordan; St. Ephrem in Hymns on the Church (36) speaks of the  
effect of the Light that resided in Mary and in the river. It polished Mary’s  
mind, made bright her thought, and pure her understanding. The  
brightness that Moses put on was wrapped from without, but Mary in  
whom He resided and the river in which He was baptized gleam from  
within. Cf. S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, Kottayam, 1994, 28-29.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Baptism of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil,  
178; Cf. S. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to  
Maronite Tradition*, Lanham, 1983, 104.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T.  
Kollamparampil, 97.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 79.

<sup>41</sup> R. Chesnut, who tries to understand the language of fire in Ezekiel’s  
vision of the chariot says that it serves three purposes. First, it points to the

nativity of the Son, when the “briars and thorns” became aware of the ‘Living Fire’ in the swaddling clothes, they fled from its presence.<sup>42</sup> Here, he says that “briars and thorns” have fled away from Christ’s presence, but he does not say that they were consumed in fire; in other words, they still exercise influence upon the world. This has a direct connection to sacramental life, for, when the believer receives the eucharistic body and blood of Christ, the evil one flees from him also, just as at the nativity of the Son. The Syrian liturgies, both East and West, make good use of this theme. Perhaps it might be due to Mar Jacob’s influence upon the West Syrian liturgy, that the reception of Holy communion which signifies the remission of sins and salvation is called the reception of the “propitiatory live coal” (*g<sup>e</sup>murto* ܡܚܬܐ) of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.3.2. Mary: the Source of Light that Removes the Darkness of the World

Mar Jacob says that the “darkness trembled” when “a flash of light shone forth over them in Bethlehem.”<sup>44</sup> The imagery of light<sup>45</sup>

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total otherness of the divinity of God, in the sense that the divinity is dangerous to approach, especially for the sinner. Secondly, it refers to the unapproachability of God through the ordinary channels of human knowledge. Thirdly, it refers to the vitality and life-giving character of God, in so far as He reveals Himself. Cf. R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 138.

<sup>42</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 97.

<sup>43</sup> *The Divine Liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Church*, 44; S. Brock, when speaking about the nature of the symbols of fire and water in Baptism and Eucharist, says that it retains its ambiguous character in the sacraments: “that they (water and fire) can be destructive or life-giving; the ‘fire’ of the Holy Spirit, which for Ephrem enters the baptismal font and the bread and wine at their consecration, retains something of this ambiguous character, in that it is just as much the fire of judgement which consumes those who treat these mysteries with contempt”. S. Brock, “The Poet as Theologian”, in *Sobornost*, 7:6. (1978), 248.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Light is a recurrent title for Christ in Syriac tradition. For example, the *qōlo* of Tuesday morning prayer begins with an invocation to Christ in



in the context of the nativity is closely connected to “the Living Fire” in swaddling clothes. The Gospel account regarding the birth of Christ presents Christ as the sun who, by His light, removes the darkness of the world (Lk 1:79; Mt 4:16). Just as the sun shines from heaven and gives light to the earth, Christ, who is born from the womb of Mary, will remove the darkness of the world.

The Great Sun of Righteousness shone forth from her,  
and a glorious light which banished darkness from the  
region.<sup>46</sup>

In a homily *On Habib*, the martyr, Mar Jacob gives us a hint to understanding what he means by darkness. For him darkness is paganism and ‘to be in light’ is total conformity to Christ.<sup>47</sup> It is the ignorance of God that paves the way for darkness. The world that refuses to receive the divine revelation and is enclosed in its own self-sufficiency stands in contrast with the ‘Light’ and is seen as ‘darkness.’ In this state it is separated from God; and no communion with God is possible. Christ introduces Himself as the light (Jn 8:12); a light which illumines all people (Jn 1:9) and He says that anyone who follows Him will no longer walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12).<sup>48</sup> Eternal life consists in ‘knowing

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which He is addressed as the ‘light of the worlds’ (*nuhro d'olmo*). Cf. *Kthōbo dazlūtho šlīmtho*, Pampakuda, 1988, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 40.

<sup>47</sup> “Flight of light, he was and contended against the darkness which covered the country from the paganism which had obscured it.” Jacob of Serugh, *On Habib the Martyr*, ET by W. Cureton, in *Ancient Syriac Documents Relative to the Earliest Establishment of Christianity in Edessa and the Neighbouring Countries, from the Year after Our Lord’s Ascension to the Beginning of the Fourth Century*, London, 1864, 87.

<sup>48</sup> The vision of Christ as light in darkness is taken up in Syriac tradition; in the 4<sup>th</sup> century St. Ephrem wrote in the *Hymns on the Nativity*:

The day of the All-Illumining is glad at His birth.  
It is a pillar of rays that pursues with its beams  
the works of darkness in a type of that day  
on which light was created  
and tore away the darkness  
spread over the beauty of creation.



the Father and His Son Jesus Christ'; and the absence of knowledge concerning God ends in darkness. According to the revelation received from Christ, John declared that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 Jn 1:5). It is this light that removes the darkness of the world. When Mar Jacob speaks about the martyrdom of Ss. Guria and Shamuna, he says that Christ the Sun has removed the darkness from the hearts of the martyrs.<sup>49</sup> He praises Ss. Guria and Shamuna for having come out of the darkness of paganism and embraced Christ, the light. Their love for the Son of God and adhesion to Him enabled them to be slain by the sword. From Jacob's presentation, it may be concluded that, through martyrdom, these saints achieved the fullness of communion with God. So when Mar Jacob says that from Mary shines forth the light who removes the darkness of the world, he hints at the beginning of the reunion of humanity with God.

Second heaven, in whose womb the Lord of heaven dwelt  
and shone forth from her to expel darkness from the lands.<sup>50</sup>

Having considered how Mar Jacob looked on Mary as the "ark of fire," in the next section he presents Mary as the ark of Scriptures.

#### 2.4. Mary: The "Ark of Scriptures" (qībūtho malyāth safre **قَابُوثَا مَالْيَاثُ سَفْرَا**)

Why does Mar Jacob call Mary the "ark of Scriptures"? Scripture is the Word of God. In the Old Testament, the Word of God was kept in the ark, and we read in the Letter to the Hebrews that the tablet of the covenant was also kept in the ark (Heb 9:3-5).

The ray of our Redeemer's birth  
entered and tore away the darkness upon the heart.

Ephrem, *Hymn on the Nativity*, 26:3; ET by K. Mcvey, 206.

<sup>49</sup> "The Sun of Righteousness above was risen within their hearts: by which they were enlightened, and with light the darkness chased". Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *An Oration on Shamuna and Guria*, ET by W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 97.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

She was carried as an ark full of scriptures;  
in her dwelt the “interpretation” of the mysteries of prophecy.  
So that her magnificence might be greater than that of the ark,  
the babe exulted for she was adorned in a wonderful way.<sup>51</sup>

Behold my daughter, in the prophecy it is “written” that the virgin will conceive; in this prophet read and understand about your conception.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 55.

whom Mary bore was the Son of the Most High. She honours Mary by saying:

Mother of the King, with how many mouths to praise that  
One who dwells in you, who has come and visited me in my  
poor house!<sup>54</sup>

The Holy Scripture contains prophecies concerning the coming of the Son of God. The realization of these promises took place in His coming to humanity through Mary, of which we read in the Letter to the Hebrews that “in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son” (Heb 1:1). Mar Jacob treats the glorious conception of the virgin as containing all the riches and the interpretation of the mysteries.

It was an abode in which were dwelling:  
all riches, explanation of mysteries, and interpretation of the  
books of the prophets.<sup>55</sup>

So far we have looked at the biblical context and how Mar Jacob made use of the symbol of the ‘ark of the Covenant’, now we will see its theological significance.

## 2.5. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Ark of the Covenant”

In the expository section of the symbol “the ark of mysteries” we have seen three main aspects. 1) The ark was a symbol of the presence of God in front of which they offered sacrifice and expressed their joy (2 Sam 6:13-14,17-18). Israel honoured the ark, for the people believed that God resided in it. 2) Mary is the ark in whom “Fire” dwelt. 3) Mary is the ark in whom the fulfilment of the Scripture takes place. The ark was the medium by which God dwelt among the people, ‘that I may dwell in their midst’ (Ex 25:8). Mar Jacob presents Mary as the signified and as the fulfilment of what was symbolised in the ark of the covenant, for he calls her the

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<sup>54</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 79.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 83.



“habitation of Godhead.”<sup>56</sup> Mary, carrying the Son of God, stands in the midst of humanity just as the ark was in the midst of the people. This takes us to the theme of Mary’s mediation which will be dealt with in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

According to Mar Jacob, what had taken place as a figure in the story of Israel became a reality in Mary. The Son of God dwelt in the Virgin Mary both as perfect God and perfect man. This is the pivotal point in the divine maternity of Mary. Mary is honoured because the Incarnate God dwelt in her and grew in her.<sup>57</sup> Not only is God present in Mary as in the ark, but also this presence is felt in the house of Zechariah. The presence of God, which was hidden in the Old Testament, became tangible in the Annunciation, and that presence was celebrated in the house of Zechariah when Mary visited Elizabeth. That which was a shadow in the Old Testament became a reality in Mary’s conception. By calling Mary the “ark full of fire”, Mar Jacob recognized Mary’s child, Christ, as the fire that burns up and purifies the world from its iniquities. Mary becomes worthy of such an honour because of her total self-gift in co-operating with God’s plan of saving the world. Her initial purity and the divine maternity are affirmed in the symbolism of the ark.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 53.

<sup>57</sup> In the Syriac tradition, both in the writings of the fathers and in the liturgical prayers, the ark is depicted as a figure of Mary. In the *lilyo* (night vigil) of the annunciation to the Mother of God, the West Syrian Church prays: “The ark which Moses built on Sinai, in which he placed the tablets of the Law, represented you, Mary, as a figure.” *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of the Asian Churches*, Vol. II, ET by F. Acharya, 58.

<sup>58</sup> The Egyptians and the Ethiopians have understood Mary as the second ark that saved the world. This can be seen in the discourse of Demetris of Antioch.

Hail (Mary), Tent of the Godhead, wherein the Only-begotten of the Father hath reposed!

Hail, thou who hast found favour! The Lord is with thee.

Hail (Mary) thou Ark, covered all over with gold,

wherein God the Father sojourned in the Form of His Holy Word.

W. Budge, *Legends of Our Lady the Perpetual Virgin and Her Mother Hanna*, London, 1922, xxxiv.

Mar Jacob did not limit his enquiry to drawing a parallel, but went further and said that she “was even more beautiful than the ark full of mysteries of the house of God.”<sup>59</sup> The glory of Mary is greater than the glory of the ark of God for, He who presented Himself in the symbol of the ark, made Himself really present in Mary. The child in the womb of Elizabeth leaped with joy, just as David danced in front of the ark. When David had heard that the Lord blessed the household of Obededom because of the ark of God, David brought up the ark of God to his city. He danced before the Lord and shouted with the sound of his horn (2 Sam 6:1-23) forgetting the order of royalty, for he was aware of the blessed and graceful presence of the Lord in the ark. This exultation of David was a prefigure of the exultation of John before the Son of God.<sup>60</sup> Here John, the child in Elizabeth’s womb, danced with joy, because the Lord of mysteries dwelt within Mary. Elizabeth felt this as she heard Mary’s greetings (Lk 1:41). So Mar Jacob renders a greater honour to Mary “than the ark full of mysteries.”

The Old Testament is fulfilled in Mary on account of another factor, namely the manna that had been kept in the ark (Heb 9:4-5). Mary is compared to the ark which contained the urn of manna which the fathers ate and died. But from Mary comes forth the “living bread”, as Christ says: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:48-51). The urn of manna that had been seen in the ark was a prefigure of Mary who carried the bread of life, the Son of God. The one whom they adored in the ark was really present in Mary, and He received His human existence from her.

Thus Mary becomes the living symbol of the ark. Like the one who faithfully obeyed the instructions to construct the ark, Mary made herself an ark by her humility, virtues and loyalty to God. We have dealt with the symbol of the “ark of God” and have seen how the presence of God in Mary was understood by Mar Jacob. The

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<sup>59</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 74.

<sup>60</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 74.



next biblical symbol we will discuss is the symbol of heaven, which Mar Jacob calls the “second heaven.”

### 3. The “Second Heaven” (*šmāyo d'tarthen* مَعْنَا، تَارْتِثَن)

The symbolic expression of Mary as the “second heaven” stands for Mary’s motherhood. In all religions, people associate heaven with the abode of God, from where God reigns over the earth and all in it. Now since the Son of God has come down and dwelt in Mary, she is considered as a second heaven. The nature of the One who was born of Mary is the reason why Mary is called the “second heaven” in Mar Jacob’s thought.

#### 3.1. “Second Heaven” – The Biblical Foundation

A study of ‘heaven in the Bible’ is a vast topic; so here we will limit ourselves to the aspects that help us to better understand Jacob’s development of the theme of the second heaven. In the Old Testament the word ‘heaven’ is used both with cosmological significance as part of the physical universe and with religious significance as the dwelling place of God, particularly as the source of His salutary blessings.<sup>61</sup> In the Book of Psalms we read that God has placed his habitation on the heights (Ps 91:9). In the Gospel according to John we read, that Christ came down from heaven and ascended to heaven (Jn 6:62; 13:1) and that He goes to heaven to prepare a place for His followers. St. Paul also writes that God raised Christ from the dead and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly place. St. Peter reminds us that according to Christ’s promise we wait for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet 3:13). Heaven is the consummation of salvation history when the world will be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth (Is 65:17; Rom 8:19-23; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. J. Plastaras, “Heaven (in the Bible)”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI, New York, 1966, 968.



### 3.2. The Womb contained Him Whom the Heaven could not contain

The mystery of the nativity is seen in an atmosphere of wonder because it surpasses human concepts. Mar Jacob makes a contrast between heaven, which is insufficient to contain God (1 Kings 8:27), and the “small womb” of Mary in which He willed to dwell.<sup>62</sup> Mar Jacob depicts this miracle: “A virgin conceived Him, a womb has contained Him and the manger sustained Him.”<sup>63</sup>

Second heaven, in whose womb the Lord of heaven dwelt  
and shone forth from her to expel darkness from the lands.<sup>64</sup>

The wings of flames were extended and evenings vanished.  
The heavenly beings descended, walked upon earth and they  
made it a heaven.

The regions have interwoven a crown of praise for the Lord of  
glories,  
one from heaven and another from earth were offered to  
Him.<sup>65</sup>

At the nativity of the Son, the angels descended and surrounded the child and sang praise to him.<sup>66</sup> Mar Jacob's narration of the descent of the heavenly beings and their singing of praise is a clear indication that the child is God by nature who is praised by the angels in heaven. Therefore the place where this child lives is also like heaven. Through such a narration Jacob

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<sup>62</sup> In the development of this theme, Mar Jacob might have been influenced by St. Ephrem. For, we read in the *Hymns of the Nativity* 4:174: “For while the power dwelt in the womb, it was forming babes in the womb.” This corresponds to Mar Jacob's lines: “Behold the fashioner of all babes, who was made a babe, and the Great One of whom heaven is full, dwelt in a womb.” Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 95.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 84.

taught his fellow Christians about the true Incarnation of God. He asserted the two births of the Son: the first was His eternal birth from the Father and the second was His birth in time from Mary.<sup>67</sup> The following quotation refers to the two births of Christ, one from the Father before all times and the other from Mary according to human nature.<sup>68</sup>

That (birth) is remote from all ranks of the heavenly beings  
but this one is approached even by the Magi with their  
offerings.<sup>69</sup>

God's majesty coming to humility and lowliness is illustrated by the use of images in which parallelism and contrast are intertwined. The babe to whom Mary gave birth is the same one who forms babies in the wombs of mothers.<sup>70</sup> The creator taking the form of a creature is a real contrast. The contrast that had taken place at the nativity was that God of whom heaven is full, had come to dwell in the "small womb" of Mary when He became a babe.

Briefly, according to Mar Jacob, Mary stands not merely in parallel with this symbol, she is more significant than the symbol. When we consider heaven as His abode, there is nothing to speak of as a relation between the two. But in the case of Mary this is not so, for she became a mother to the Son of God in a real sense.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 44-45.

<sup>68</sup> It is one aspect of Mar Jacob's Christological understanding, which is "composed of Ephrem's symbolic-mystical vision of the mystery of Christ and the Cyrilline vision of the unity of Christ." T. Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 13. In another passage Mar Jacob speaks of it more clearly: "From the (divine) essence and from humanity, single is the Only-Begotten. Son of the Majesty and son of Mary, a single redeemer." Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 79.

<sup>69</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 45.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 75.

### 3.3. Mary Outshines Heaven

When Mar Jacob compares Mary to heaven, he highlights that she has a higher relationship to the Son of God than that of heaven, because of her maternal relationship to Him. Mary's relation with Christ is dynamic, and has the characteristics of a mother's relationship to her child.<sup>71</sup> The One who dwells in heaven and is incessantly praised by the heavenly beings, has taken bodily form from a woman. In Mary, God who is infinite becomes finite, the unlimited becomes limited. His dwelling in Mary makes her "the second heaven" and the descent of the angels to praise him at his nativity confirm this mystery.<sup>72</sup> Here we quote Mar Jacob's words which describe the personal relationship between Mary and her Son and illustrate how she outshines heaven.

Heaven beholds the maiden Mother and the Only-begotten;  
between the two of them who is greater, and who is more  
blessed?

Which of them is nearer to Him and dearer to Him,  
and more precious to Him and more united to Him?  
Heaven did not give milk to Him who became a Babe,  
but He seized the breast in the bosom of Mary who had  
become his Mother.

Heaven did not conceive Him nor bear Him nor suckle Him,  
but she bore, embraced, raised Him and to her belongs a  
blessing.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> It is also a meditative theme in the East Syrian liturgy. In the night office for the feast of the blessed Virgin Mary after Christmas there is a passage that goes like this: "O reader, do not find fault with me for having called her heaven. As I hold, she is more *precious, higher and more exalted than heaven*—Our Lord remained hidden in heaven without redeeming the human race until there was for him a dwelling." P. Podipara, "The Mariology of the East Syrian Church", in *CO 2* (1981), 178.

<sup>72</sup> Mar Jacob speaks of the presence of the angels and the watchers at the nativity of Christ. The angels descended to announce the message of the nativity to the shepherds. Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 82. And, 'the watchers make joyful noise with their hosannas and with their chants [...]' Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 106.

<sup>73</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 69.



Although from the external point of view, heaven and Mary belong to the realm of creatures, Mary is far beyond heaven. She has welcomed the creator of all creatures. From the outset of Mary's encounter with the angel she co-operated with God's plan without hesitating. It was this co-operation that led her to unite with God which in effect led to the union of all of human-kind with God. This promptness of the maiden Mother was very decisive as regards the Incarnation.

In short, Mary's relation to the Son of God is not a mere passive nearness, as in the case of heaven, but an active participation through faith, obedience and loyalty. The difference between Mary and heaven consists in Christ's personal relationship to Mary as His mother; like any mother she feels with her Son and is to Him what every mother is to her child. She is near to Him to nurture Him and to sing lullabies. All these actions denote the dynamic relationship that existed between the child and the mother. Having seen the relationship of Mary to Christ, let us see, what Mar Jacob thought was the relationship of heaven to Christ.

Heaven is his throne and Mary his Mother and behold they are  
not equal,  
for the throne does not resemble the Mother because the  
Mother is greater.

Heaven and Mary, singly He chose the both of them,  
He made one of them a throne and the other a Mother.  
I will not call heaven "Mary" lest be dishonoured  
the Mother of the king by the name of his throne, and He  
become angry with me.<sup>74</sup>

This One who dwells in a small womb and it carries Him;  
heaven is great but it does not enclose Him, that He be  
contained by it.<sup>75</sup>

Mar Jacob wanted to establish that the dignity of Mary and heaven were not equal in relation to Christ and, so no one could call

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<sup>74</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 69.

<sup>75</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 75.

heaven 'Mary.' For although heaven is his throne, the glory of Mary is greater than heaven; because she is His mother who carried him, suckled him and sang lullabies to her silent babe. When we try to discover why Jacob conferred upon Mary an honour higher than the heaven we realize that it was the result of her self-surrender to God's plan of salvation and her consequent commitment to its realization.<sup>76</sup> Therefore when Mar Jacob meditated upon Mary's blessing to carry in her hands the Redeemer of humanity, he says that she is not equal to heaven:

Heaven and Mary were for Him equal when He dwelt in her,  
yet not equal, for to the one who beholds her Mary is greater.<sup>77</sup>

In this section I have tried to show that the relationship between Mary and Christ was real and so she outshines heaven. This takes me to the next aspect, namely that the Child whom Mary bore in her womb was incomprehensible.

### 3.4. God Dwells in Mary, Yet He is Incomprehensible

Mar Jacob wanted to emphasize that even in His becoming the Son of man Jesus was the incomprehensible God who is praised by the heavenly beings.<sup>78</sup> He exalted Mary since she became the

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<sup>76</sup> In an *Anonymous Hymn on Mary* we read how Mary became greater than heaven. It is because the Child born of Mary is the One who gives life to the Watchers with his very breath and because the child has grown on Mary's milk. *Anonymous Hymn on Mary*, ed., T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones* III, Malines, 1889, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 68; An anonymous hymn of Mary mentions that Mary, an orphan girl has become the very heaven to the almighty God because the one who came to save the world resided in her. ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 99.

<sup>78</sup> In Greek Patristic thought, God is incomprehensible, ineffable, invisible and inaccessible in His nature or essence. The Fathers' definitions of God are negative, (*apophatic*), which means it is impossible to know God positively or rationally. Since they had to explain the problem of the divinization of man, "The Eastern Church was therefore compelled to recognize in God an ineffable distinction, other than that between His essence and His persons, according to which He is, under different aspects, both totally inaccessible and at the same time accessible. This distinction is







in the object of our enquiry and, in the case of theology, are willing actually to participate in the mystery concerned.”<sup>81</sup> The scribe pretends to understand it and wants to interpret it, but he cannot comprehend it because the glory of the divine presence is dwelling in the womb of Mary.<sup>82</sup> And since he is standing outside and making his enquiry he fails to see the wonder, but the faithful one looks at the wonder and sees the truth. This is how Mar Jacob puts it:

He is exalted and fearful and one who is sung to, behold, the  
wonder.  
Heaven is too small for Him and so He sought a home, behold,  
what a grace.<sup>83</sup>

The incomprehensible greatness of God is a theme in Mar Jacob’s homilies, for in his homily *On the Annunciation* we read:

Because He dwelt in her womb, it is known that He is without  
limit;  
heaven and earth are small for Him to dwell in.  
If a small place had been too small for Him, and a big one too  
big,

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<sup>81</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 30. That God cannot be known fully is based on the awareness that the intellect that has knowledge of something must be greater than the object of its knowledge. Anyone who claims that it is possible to know God, is in effect saying that human intellect is capable of containing God, the uncontainable. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 13.

<sup>82</sup> The Syriac tradition considers love and wonder as a basic requirement to approach the divine mysteries. Only a believer possesses this character, for, to the outsider it is strange and he cannot marvel at this. St. Ephrem in his *Hymns on Faith*, has brought out this theme powerfully:

Your fountain, Lord, is hidden  
from the person who does not thirst for You;  
Your treasury seems empty to the person who rejects You.  
Love is the treasurer of Your heavenly treasure store.

Ephrem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Hymnen de Fide*, 32:3, CSCO 154, Syri. 73, 108, ET by S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 80.

He would not have been great because in a small place He  
would be contained.  
And because the great heaven and a small womb are worthy of  
Him,  
by this He makes known his incomprehensible greatness.<sup>84</sup>

Mar Jacob makes strenuous efforts with the concepts of love, wonder and humility to get into the mystery of Christ, but he does not arrive at satisfactory answers. What he observes is a contradiction when considered in the natural order of things. Jacob presents the contradiction in this way: Jesus' birth is divine as well as human. He is divine but a human womb bore Him; He is hidden from the watchers but adored by people; He is from the divine essence and from humanity; He is Son of the Majesty and Son of Mary; He is hidden in His divinity but revealed in His humanity. Yet He is a single Redeemer.<sup>85</sup> The human mind cannot comprehend this mystery.

Heaven is too small to be sufficient to carry His hidden nature,  
but a solitary woman escorts and carries His magnificence.<sup>86</sup>

When reflecting on the Nativity, the human mind is able to comprehend something, yet what it knows leads to further doubts. It leads to the incomprehensibility of God as Jacob states it: "He is clothed in flames, girded in swaddling clothes, yet incomprehensible."<sup>87</sup> Heaven is great but it does not enclose Him. The greatness of vast objects or the lowliness of small objects has nothing to do with God. God is not to be understood according to human measurement for He is without limit. That is why the small womb of Mary and the great heaven are equal for Him.

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<sup>84</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 68.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 79-80.

<sup>86</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 76.

<sup>87</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 80.

The stretches of heaven are not vast for Him, because He is  
bigger than all;  
the humble maiden is not small for Him because He extends  
and contracts Himself.  
He descended and dwelt in her and her small womb was large  
for Him,  
for a small place cannot straighten or constrain Him.<sup>88</sup>

Heaven is small but the maiden is great according to your will,  
for that one is inadequate but this one is fruitful because You  
strengthened her.<sup>89</sup>

The above passages enable us to realize that even in His coming down to humanity God is incomprehensible to the human mind.<sup>90</sup> Although heaven is insufficient for Him, when He came to be born corporeally He was satisfied to dwell in the womb of Mary. This led Jacob to call her the second heaven. Mar Jacob viewed the Incarnation of Christ in relation to the earth in which He dwelt. He wonders at the blessings that the earth received when Christ came to dwell in it and extends this title to the earth and calls it a new heaven.

Let creation be glad because the Son of the creator has  
descended and dwelt in it  
and He has made the earth a new heaven by His birth.<sup>91</sup>

Having seen the different aspects of the symbol of the “second heaven” and its relationship to Mary let us come to the theological significance of this symbol.

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<sup>88</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 68.

<sup>89</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 67.

<sup>90</sup> In summarising St. Ephrem's stance on the abiding mysteriousness and inaccessibility of God, S. Beggiani says that for St. Ephrem, “the realm of the divine is radically inaccessible to reason. While the fact of God's existence is knowable, the nature of the divine remains impenetrable.” S. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to Maronite Tradition*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 126.



### 3.5. The Theological Significance of the “Second Heaven”

In the Bible, heaven occupies an important place, for it is the throne of God (Mt 5:34). The worthiness of heaven is due to the fact that God dwells in it; no matter whether heaven so wills or not. But the worthiness of Mary flows from the fact that she voluntarily said ‘yes’ to the angel’s appeal and thereby wholeheartedly welcomed the Son of God into her life. She was faithful to the consent made at the time of the Annunciation till the end. We read in Mar Jacob’s homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary* how Mary united herself with Christ at the time of Crucifixion:

She endured sufferings when she saw that You were hung on  
the cross,  
that with a spear they had pierced your side on Golgotha;  
and when the Jews had sealed the sepulchre in which had been  
placed  
your living body which gives life and remits debts.<sup>92</sup>

The presence of Mary at the passion and death of Christ was a sign of her fidelity and perseverance in commitment. Another interesting thing is that it was to unfold a greater mystery that Mar Jacob compares Mary with heaven. The mystery is the Son of God whose throne is the vast heaven. But now He dwells silently in the small womb of Mary. Jacob’s comparison of Mary with heaven is not a static analogy, but a dynamic principle that enables us to go beyond the horizon of thought and imagination. For Christ, heaven is too small, but the womb of Mary is spacious enough.

Heaven is too small and it does not contain Him if He dwells  
in it  
but spacious enough is the bosom of Mary for Him to be  
carried about in it.<sup>93</sup>

Mary, through her co-operation, faith and perseverance became the dwelling place for the Son of God on earth. She provided a human nature for the invisible Son of God when He

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<sup>92</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 90.

<sup>93</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 123.

willed to come down to humanity. A re-entry into Paradise was made possible for Adam, the head of the human race who was driven out of his pristine glory.<sup>94</sup> Mar Jacob rejoices in the virgin on account of her blessedness and calls her a “second heaven.” He does not call heaven ‘Mary’ because this dishonours her.<sup>95</sup> The analysis of the symbol of heaven clarifies that Mary was more worthy than heaven to carry the Son of God.

#### 4. The Symbol of the “Shining Castle” (*bīrtho p’ytho* ܚܝܬܐ ܦܝܬܐ)

Another symbol that describes the mystery of Mary’s divine maternity is that of the “shining castle” or “fair palace (*bīrtho p’ytho* ܚܝܬܐ ܦܝܬܐ) which the King built and entered and dwelt in.”<sup>96</sup> A castle is a fortified building in which a king dwells. How does it become a shining castle? It becomes a shining castle because of the fame of the king who dwells in it. Why is Mary a shining castle? It is because a King dwelt in Mary, this made a castle of her. Unlike the kings who acquired fame because of their might and power, the King who dwelt in her did not *acquire* might and fame, for He is the Mighty One (*ganbōro* ܓܢܒܐܪܐ) <sup>97</sup> by nature. His fame is not an acquired fame, for He is the eternal and great Son.<sup>98</sup> It is not only Mary’s beauty and sanctity, but the Son of God who dwelt in her that makes her a shining castle. To use the imagery of the “shining castle” when speaking about Mary is very appropriate.

##### 4.1. “Shining Castle”: Symbol of Mary’s Pure Body

Mar Jacob calls Mary a castle because the Son of God, who is the King of kings dwelt in her. Just like the ancient royal castles which attracted visitors because of the kings who dwelt in them, Mary has become the “shining castle” for ever, and is worthy of being revered. The expression, ‘pure castle’ refers to the pure body of Mary in whom God dwelt. Her purity and willingness to co-operate in God’s work of salvation made her worthy of becoming

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 127.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 96.

the mother of the Lord. Here is Jacob's depiction of Mary's splendid personality:

Peace be upon you, castle of holy things and full of virtues,<sup>1</sup>  
Harbour of mysteries and new ship full of riches.<sup>99</sup>

Mar Jacob presents the above lines in the context of the Annunciation. He tries to communicate two things; first, the state in which the angel met the virgin and secondly what she became in giving her consent to become the mother of God's Son. The expression 'castle of holy things and full of virtues' stands for Mary who is humble, pure, limpid and without blemish; Mary was deemed worthy to be the mother of the Son of God.<sup>100</sup> When Jacob reflects on the personality of Mary, he also adds that no person in this world was so worthy as Mary to become the mother of the Son of God.

If another had pleased more than her, He would have chosen  
that one,  
for the Lord does not respect persons since He is just and  
right.  
If there had been a spot in her soul or a defect,  
He would have sought for Himself another mother in whom  
there is no blemish.<sup>101</sup>

Mary's struggle to withstand all the difficulties that hindered her relationship to God makes her worthy to be called blessed. Although it was a call from above to be the mother of God, it was her effort and strife that enabled her to be the mother of God. Mar Jacob is of the opinion that God chose Mary, because she had been pleasing to Him. We see this in the following lines:

By her humility, by her purity, by her uprightness,  
and by her good will, she was pleasing and was chosen for  
Him.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 45.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.

<sup>101</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 26.



The question as to why Mary is a shining castle is clarified in the above passage. It was not her external beauty but her inner holiness that was pleasing to God. Mar Jacob says that she was pure and limpid in her soul and He wanted to dwell in her.<sup>103</sup> This was what made her a “shining castle.” Mar Jacob puts into the mouth of Joseph, her betrothed, a beautiful tribute to Mary as the dwelling place for God.

And if your offspring is from the Spirit, I do not venture  
to approach the pure castle, in which the King has resided.<sup>104</sup>

The context of this verse is that Joseph, Mary’s spouse was not yet aware of the source of the conception of Mary. He did not know whether she had conceived from another man or from the Holy Spirit. Prior to the encounter between Gabriel and Joseph, Mar Jacob presents a dialogue between Mary and Joseph in which Mary could not convince Joseph that her conception was an action of the Holy Spirit. However, Joseph expresses his willingness to collaborate with Mary for this divine mission by remaining in the consecrated state of chastity when he says: “I do not venture to approach the pure castle, in which the King has resided.” Here again it is the unique motherhood of Mary that is focused upon in this expression.

#### **4.2. The “Shining Castle” - Dual Symbol of Maternity and Virginity**

The metaphor of the dwelling of the King in the castle is a royal imagery; a symbol of Mary’s maternity. The splendour of the imagery of the castle is very fascinating; our poet embellishes this symbol with the addition that the doors of the castle were not opened when the king went out.<sup>105</sup> Here, Mary’s maternity and virginity are symbolically brought out in a single picture.

<sup>102</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 25.

<sup>104</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 71.

<sup>105</sup> That Christ is born of Virgin Mary, has entered into the ancient liturgical tradition of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch is the first witness who in his profession of faith wrote that our Lord is born of the Virgin Mary. Cf. L.

Fair palace which the King built and entered and dwelt in it;  
the doors were not opened before Him when He was going  
out.<sup>106</sup>

God made Mary a beautiful palace and was born from her. When He came out of Mary, the seal of her virginity remained intact. This text shows Jacob's dogmatic position on *virginitas in partu*. Mary who gave her consent to becoming the mother of the Son of God, was respected by God in that He let her remain in the state of virginity. Mar Jacob's basic argument for holding this position is that the One who came to make perfect what was already lost, would not destroy what is perfect. In this context it is noteworthy that St. Ephrem, Jacob's predecessor used the title "royal palace" for Mary's virginity<sup>107</sup> and for her divine motherhood as well.<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the "Shining Castle"

In presenting Mary as the shining castle, Mar Jacob teaches that she alone was the worthy mother for the Son of God. It is not a dry depiction of the structure of a building that Mar Jacob gives, but a living symbol in which he presents the person who wholeheartedly welcomed into her life the eternal Son of the Father. When Mary

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Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church, The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, ET by T. Muffer, San Fransisco, 1999, 30-31.

<sup>106</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Babe in the womb, since the seal of virginity  
abides, the womb was for You  
the royal palace, and the curtain.  
Evidence of virginity upon it, evidence of virginity outside,  
a fetus inside – a great paradox.  
Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 12:2, ET by K. Mcvey, 134.

<sup>108</sup> Blessed are you, O castle of the King,  
whose gate is greater than mortal beings.  
The glorious King dwelt within you.  
Let His love be a bulwark for your beauty.  
Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 24:11, ET by K. Mcvey, 368.

visits Elizabeth, it is on seeing the King in this shining palace that Elizabeth's son begins to dance in front of Mary.

She, the palace of flesh, walked and ascended, and the King  
was in it;  
 and stood at the door of the servant who shook, while still in  
his mother.<sup>109</sup>

Mary was shining with the presence of God in her as she carried Him in her womb. Mary's exceptional beauty of virginity is illustrated by Mar Jacob saying that the doors of the palace were not opened when He went out of it. So, Mar Jacob presents Mary as the most perfect one in the whole of creation and the word "pure Castle" is one of the finest expressions to describe that God found her worthy and so He dwelt in her.

### 5. The Symbol of the "Pure Temple" (*nawso dakyo* نَوْسَا دَاكْيُو) in Which the King Dwelt

After dealing with the secular imagery of king and castle, Mar Jacob took the symbol of the "pure temple" that was of utmost importance to the Israelites in the Old Testament. He saw the temple of Solomon as a prefigure of Mary, the temple whom the Holy Spirit purified and polished, and in whom the Son of God dwelt.

Blessed is she who received the Holy Spirit, He purified and  
polished her,  
 He made her a temple, and the Lord Most High dwelt in her  
abode.<sup>110</sup>

Jacob implies that in becoming the mother of Christ, Mary acquired as high an honour as that of the temple of Solomon occupied in the Old Testament. In Mar Jacob's writings we see that the temple which Solomon built according to the plan of God became perfected in Mary. The sanctuary of the temple where

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<sup>109</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 63.

<sup>110</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.



sacrifice was offered, is described in the Letter to the Hebrews as “a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one” (Heb 9:24).<sup>111</sup> When the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and sanctifies her,<sup>112</sup> she becomes a “pure temple” for the Son of God. And the Lord whom Zechariah incensed in the Holy of Holies dwells in this temple.

The altar of incense which he serves in the Holy of Holies  
is not greater than you for behold in you is the Lord of  
holiness.<sup>113</sup>

Closely related to the theme of the temple are the terms “house of divinity”, “Sanctity”, “habitation of Godhead”, “shrine”, “spotless womb”, and “the abode in which the mysteries dwelt.” All of these refer to the reality of Mary’s purity. They refer to her life and vision which were more pleasing to the Most Holy to reside in, than was the temple of Solomon. The household of the old priest could understand so well the differentiation between the altar of the Holies in which Zechariah offered incense to God and Mary in whom God dwelt.

### 5.1. The “Pure Temple” - Biblical Foundation

The Old Testament concept of the temple is that of the dwelling place of God on earth.<sup>114</sup> The origin of the temple can be

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<sup>111</sup> When we read the hymn of the Chorepiscopus Balai for the consecration of a Church in Qennesrin, we see the author thanking God for dwelling on earth in a house built by human hands. R. Murray has summed it up: “This Church gives God an earthly as well as a heavenly home, or rather it is heaven on earth.” R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 227; Cf. Balai, *Hymns: in S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni Balaei Aliorumque Opera Selecta*, ed., J. J. Overbeck, Oxford, 1865, 251-252.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 37.

<sup>113</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 54.

<sup>114</sup> About the concept of the temple in the ancient times, C. Meyers says that the temple building in ancient times was not a place of public gathering and prayer as we understand it today, rather the temple was conceived of as a dwelling place for the deity on earth. Cf. C. Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, 351.

traced back to King David. After Israel's possession of the land, the people no longer lived in tents but in houses, and when David found that the ark of the covenant still dwelt in a tent he expressed his intention of constructing a temple. But God told David that he should not build a temple and that it was his offspring who would build a house for Him (2 Sam 7:5; 1 Kings 8:18-19).<sup>115</sup> After having built an exalted house for God (1 Kings. 8:13), Solomon wondered at His mystery. "Behold, when the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). The attitude behind his surprise was: how can the Unlimited One limit himself, how can the Great One become small to dwell in a temple built by human hands? Solomon did not understand how this was possible. But he believed God's promise: "My name will be there" (1 Kings 8:29), trusted Him, and found confidence in Him. Mary also could not grasp the message of the angel; and she asked "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34). Believing that nothing is impossible with God she submits herself to be the mother of God, saying "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word" (Lk 1:37-38).

The New Testament applies the term *temple* to every Christian. When the Jews demanded a sign from Jesus, he replied "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). John interpreted the temple as "the temple of His body" (Jn 2:21). St. Paul speaks of every Christian as the temple of God in Christ, for he writes: "in whom (Christ) you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22). He emphasizes that a Christian is God's temple, and that God's Spirit "dwells" in him (1 Cor 3:16; 17, 6:19). We read in the Acts of the Apostles that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands" (Acts 7:48). In the light of the biblical references regarding the "pure temple", let us see how Mar Jacob applies this to Mary.

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<sup>115</sup> The reason why God told David not to build a house for Him was because he had shed much blood upon the earth (1 Chron 22:8-22).

## 5.2. Mary: The “Pure Temple ”

It was since the Son of God dwelt in her that Mary became a “pure temple.” According to Mar Jacob the only reason for God to becoming man, was that the Great One wished (*zbo rābo* ܙܒܘ ܪܐܒܐ)<sup>116</sup> to do so. This is a mystery which a human cannot understand. Just like Solomon who wondered at the presence of God in the temple he had built (1 Kings 8:27), Mar Jacob is also at a loss to explain the mystery of the Incarnation and Mary’s motherhood.

Blessed is she in whose small and barren womb dwelt  
the Great One by whom the heavens are filled and are too  
small for Him.<sup>117</sup>

Just as Solomon’s temple was adorned lavishly with gold, silver, rare wood and precious stones, for God to dwell in it, “in the new dispensation, God adorned Mary as His temple - with all the riches of His grace and virtues.”<sup>118</sup> Mar Jacob describes how Mary became the living temple in which God was pleased to dwell:

She gathered and removed all (such) reckonings from her  
mind.  
She sprinkled her pure temple with love before the Holy  
One.<sup>119</sup>

The Holy Spirit “sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among women”,<sup>120</sup> and this was what made her a pure temple. The Holy Spirit vivified Mary and enabled her to pursue God’s plan till the end of her life. Because of the Spirit who inundates her, she always remains “full of grace.” St. Ephrem views Mary’s body as the earth of the temple in whom instead of

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<sup>116</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 96.

<sup>117</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.

<sup>118</sup> A. Buono, “Marian Typology” in *Dictionary of Mary*, New Jersey, 1997, 308.

<sup>119</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 59.

<sup>120</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 34.



sin, death and the curse of the earth, the seed of blessing is sown. The messenger of God sows the seed with his salutation and Elizabeth's greetings confirm this.<sup>121</sup> As individuals, Christians are redeemed and are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Mar Jacob describes how Mary had prepared a pure temple for God:

When the Great King desired to come to our place,  
He dwelt in the *purest shrine* of all the earth because it pleased  
Him.  
He dwelt in a spotless womb which was adorned *with*  
*virginity*,  
and with thoughts which were worthy of holiness.<sup>122</sup>

Not only Mary's co-operation with God but her conscious perseverance with the movements of the Holy Spirit makes her the House of Divinity. Since Mary in whom God is present visits the house of Zechariah, Mar Jacob extends the term *sanctuary* to the house of Zechariah.

The house of the high priest became a sanctuary;  
Majesty was simply served in it.<sup>123</sup>

What happened in Mary was very significant. She bore God, she became the temple of God and thus became a "real mediator" between person and God. Thus Mar Jacob fully brings out the possible applications of the symbol of the pure temple. He presents Mary's purity as the absence of all that is impure and as the presence of all that is desirable. This made her so beautiful that the Son of God chose to dwell in her when He descended from the house of His Father. Regarding the absence of impurity in Mary Jacob says that "she was not sullied with displeasing desires."<sup>124</sup> From her childhood she behaved in "unblemished uprightness."

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, IV § 15, ET by C. McCarthy, Oxford, 1993, 91-92.

<sup>122</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>123</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 83.

<sup>124</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

“She was most fair both in her nature and in her will.”<sup>125</sup> And to quote in full Mar Jacob’s words:

Her original nature was preserved with a will for good things  
because there were always tokens of virginity in her body and  
holy things in her soul.<sup>126</sup>

Mar Jacob brings out so well the fundamental orientation of Mary and her perseverance in remaining faithful.

### 5.3. Every Christian as a Temple

In the biblical analysis we have seen that a Christian is the temple of God for the “Spirit of God dwells” (I Cor 3:16-17) in him. As the temple of God Mary is the *purest shrine*, and she is the perfect model for the Christians as they try to achieve this goal of perfection in their life. According to Mar Jacob, Mary has reached this state of perfection for he writes: “He (God) dwelt in the *purest shrine* of all the earth because it pleased Him.”<sup>127</sup> Mary is the temple which was most pleasing to Him. As a model to all Christians, she let herself to be built in Christ by God and divine grace. R. Murray, in his *Symbols of the Church and the Kingdom* notes that in the writings of Ephrem and Aphrahat, “it (the temple) symbolizes primarily living bodies in which the Holy Spirit dwells; first, Christ’s, destroyed like the Temple but raised again; after Christ, Mary’s body in the first place, his own temple, and likewise all Christians but especially consecrated virgins.”<sup>128</sup> St. Ephrem loved to speak about this subject by narrating how St. John revered the Virgin Mary, the pure temple in which the Son of God dwelt.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>126</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24. [My italics].

<sup>128</sup> R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 226.

<sup>129</sup> With awe and tenderness the youth honoured  
the Temple in which You dwelt, to teach us  
that today the King’s Son dwells  
in holy virgins.

Having seen that, in Christian understanding, the temple is the dwelling place of God; let us see how Jacob's imagery of temple can be applied to the individual Christian.

The Temple is the house of his hidden Father,  
and "It is fitting that I be in the house of my Father," he said to  
Mary.<sup>130</sup>

In John's Gospel Christ teaches that God comes and makes His home with the one who keeps His word (Jn 14:23-24), which means that God "dwells" in those who do the will of God. Mar Jacob, in saying that "He dwelt in her womb",<sup>131</sup> convincingly affirmed that Mary kept the Word of God with utmost faithfulness and thereby became the purest shrine, the dwelling place for the Son of God.

The palace resounded with the Lord of kings who had entered  
and *dwelt in her*.  
The virgin exulted in the Lord of sanctuaries whom she  
carried.<sup>132</sup>

How does an individual Christian become the temple of God? One can become the temple of God by *building oneself in Christ* and by seeking to do the will of God, just as Mary who first became the temple of God. Mar Jacob describes how Mary was prompt to follow the Lord:

The Lord was always set before her eyes;  
on Him she was gazing, so that she might be enlightened by  
Him, and delighted in Him.<sup>133</sup>

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The discerning person who perceives she is a temple  
is terrified of dishonouring Your betrothed.

Oh, how grievous to dare  
to dishonour the King in His Temple.

Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 25:10, ET by K. Mcvey, 372.

<sup>130</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 62.

<sup>131</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 68.

<sup>132</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 62.

<sup>133</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24-25.



So the individual Christian becomes a temple of God *par excellence* by fulfilling the Will of God. He would then make His permanent dwelling in him.<sup>134</sup>

#### 5.4. Theological Significance of the “Pure Temple”

We have seen how Mar Jacob contemplated the beauty and virtuous life of Mary, which were very pleasing to God. This was the reason why she had been elected to be the mother of the Son of God. Jacob cannot but make known that she had been the most perfect person in the whole of humanity:

If there had been a spot in her soul or a defect,  
He would have sought for Himself another mother in whom  
there is no blemish.

The beauty which is the most pure of all beauties,  
exists in the one who possess it by means of a good will.<sup>135</sup>

In Mary the temple, the transcendent God limited Himself in space, and clothed Himself in human fashion. But what happened at the Incarnation is beyond human limitations and conceptions. As we have seen, this happened because Mary had made herself a “sanctuary” with purity.

Mary’s beauty is acclaimed as the most pure of all beauties because of her good will. The New Testament presents us a God who wishes to dwell in human persons and who invites person to dwell in Him; the condition for this communion is to keep the Word

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<sup>134</sup> In the New Testament, it is from Paul that we get such an interpretation. He writes to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and that temple you are” (1Cor 3:16-17). In another passage St. Paul speaks more concretely of the body of the baptized as the temple of God: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

<sup>135</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 26.

of God (Jn 14:23) and to abide in Him (Jn 15:3). Mar Jacob would interpret these conditions as “to be fair in one’s nature and will” as Mary, and to have “a will for good things.” One has to express one’s good will in freedom. The Book of Revelation gives us the inspiration to enter into this communion: “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). Therefore, just as the Son of God had come to dwell in Mary when she said “yes” to the message of God, when the individual opens up to Him in freedom, He will come to dwell in him also. And in Mary this concept of Christian vocation has reached its perfection.

## 6. The “Celestial Chariot” (*markabto dašmāyono* مَرْكَبَتَا دَاشْمَايُونَا )

Jacob of Serugh, who marvelled at the gift that Mary received, would refer to her in the biblical terms with which the Semitic culture<sup>136</sup> was very accustomed. Mary is the wife of Joseph, at the same time it is from her that the Son of God has taken bodily form. This is a wonder which a person cannot describe without the medium of comparison. So Mar Jacob compares Mary with the Old Testament events in which the unutterable and invisible God made His presence felt among the Israel.

Maiden who became like the heavenly chariot and solemnly  
carried that Mighty One, bearing Creation.<sup>137</sup>

### 6.1. The Biblical Foundation of the Symbol of the “Chariot”

Many references can be seen in the Old Testament regarding the “chariot.” Of these at least five represent the presence of God or

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<sup>136</sup> According to P. Alexander, there was an esoteric doctrine in talmudic Judaism which was concerned with two subjects: the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot (Ma’a’sēh Merkabah). “Ma’a’sēh Merkabah (Account of Chariot) contained a doctrine of mystical ascent to heaven.” Cf. P. Alexander, “A New Translation and Introduction” to 3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch (Fifth to Sixth Century A. D.), in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, ed., J. H. Charlesworth, New York, 1983, 229-231.

<sup>137</sup> Jacob Of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 20.



Kingship. The first reference to the chariot in the Bible can be seen in the Book of Genesis. When Pharaoh set Joseph over all the land of Egypt, he made him to ride in his second chariot and then the people cried before him: "Bow the Knee" (Gen 41:43). We see here the chariot as a royal vehicle.<sup>138</sup> The second reference is in the Book of Psalms which presents the chariot as the vehicle of God, "who makest the clouds thy chariot, who rides on the wings of the wind" (Ps 104:3), and as the source of God's blessings. "Thou crownest the year with thy bounty; the tracks of thy chariot drip with fatness" (Ps 65:11). In this text the 'chariot' is seen as a source of God's blessings.

The third biblical text on the symbol of the chariot can be seen in Ezekiel's prophetic vision. God had appeared to Ezekiel in a stormy wind and a great cloud (Ezek 1:4). It was the glory of the Almighty God which he saw in this vision and later on he identifies it with the Cherubim, which are characterized by mobility, because of their wings. The features of Cherubim were unnatural because they were neither animals nor persons. They were symbols of the divine presence.<sup>139</sup> Ezekiel's vision refers to the revelation of God to person. The fourth reference can be seen in the Book of Chronicles. In David's instruction to Solomon regarding the construction of the Temple, he asks him to construct a golden chariot of the Cherubim that spread their wings and cover the ark of the covenant of the Lord (1 Chron 28:18). Here the chariot is a symbol of God's presence among humans. Another important reference is in the Book of Kings. When Elijah went up into heaven, a chariot of fire separates him from Elisha (2 Kings 2:11).

This analysis helps us to understand the different perspectives of the symbol of the chariot: 1) a royal chariot, 2) source of God's

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<sup>138</sup> In the Near East and Egypt, chariots were used for warfare, hunting, parade, and travel. The Pharaoh and the royal family were conveyed in chariots in procession to the temple on feast days. So the chariot was understood as a vehicle of the privileged class. M. A. Littauer & H. Crouwel, "Chariots", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I, 888-892.

<sup>139</sup> C.Meyers, "Cherubim", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I, 899-900.



blessings, 3) revelation of God's transcendence, and 4) God's presence among humans. It is difficult to conclude from this text whether Mar Jacob applies this symbol in all the senses that we have analysed above, however, we are sure that he makes use of this symbol as God's dwelling place.

## 6.2. The "Celestial Chariot" – Understood in the Syrian Tradition

Although the book of Ezekiel does not explicitly use the term "chariot", Ezekiel's vision in which he saw the four animals who bear witness to the glory and incomprehensibility of God is spoken of in the Syrian tradition as a chariot. The prophet describes the appearance of something like a sapphire in the resemblance of a throne over the head of the cherubim. And the man clothed in linen was asked to go in to *whirling wheels* and fill his hands with burning coals from between the cherubim (Ezek 10:1-2). The Syrian Church compares Mary to this chariot, which is very much reflected in the liturgical texts of the Syrian Church. For example, the West Syrian Church in applying the biblical symbol "chariot" to Mary says that Mary's knees have become the chariot and her hands its wheels.<sup>140</sup> Mary's mouth sings the Son's glory, and so she surpasses the beauty of the chariot in the vision of Ezekiel. What was sublime and splendid in Ezekiel's vision becomes mediocre here, not because it is meaningless but because what was hidden becomes manifest, and so the chariot becomes almost unworthy to be compared to Mary.<sup>141</sup>

There is a veneration of the Holy Cross on the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the churches dedicated to her memory. In this we find the expression that Mary became the chariot which carried the Saviour of the world. She is much greater than the chariot. "The chariot had rational faces and wheels, but *Mary had a*

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Šhīmo*, (Malayalam translation, 'm<sup>e</sup>'n'ōlam', second part of the divine office), Tiruvalla, 1982, 111; *Šhīmo* ('šubaho', first part of the divine office), 70-71.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *Šhīmo*, (Malayalam translation, 'm<sup>e</sup>'n'ōlam', second part of the divine office), 111.

*mouth that sang: Praise to you, O Lord.*"<sup>142</sup> This is a parallel to 1 Chron 28:18, where we have seen that the chariot represented the presence of God symbolically. An anonymous hymn on Mary which, according to S. Brock, is from the fifth or the sixth century,<sup>143</sup> deals with this theme in a very interesting way. Mary became "a chariot of flesh" "enabling her to escort the Fiery One in her bosom." In narrating this amazing event, the hymn continues that "had there existed envy in heaven, Ezekiel's chariot would have envied at the daughter of Man."<sup>144</sup> This might be the reason for envy: while the chariot conveyed the *likeness* of His glory, Mary carried the *reality* of His majesty.

### 6.3. The Symbol of the "Celestial Chariot" as Developed by Mar Jacob

Mar Jacob's primary intention in bringing in the imagery of the chariot is to affirm the divinity of Christ, the Son of God. The tremendous mystery of the Incarnation was not well understood by the Jews and docetists. Here the chariot reminded the faithful of the manifestation of the transcendent God. By saying that the child whom Mary carries in her arms is the one who appeared to Ezekiel, Mar Jacob imparts his perspective on the Incarnate God who is both man and God. Mar Jacob highlights the divinity of Christ so greatly that he transfers the title "Cherub of flesh" to Simeon and says that "instead of *wheels* he carried Him in his hands."<sup>145</sup> In emphasizing the Incarnation of the Son, he also emphasized that Christ who redeemed the world is the architect of the whole of creation.

By Him was built the palace of (both) worlds from the  
beginning;

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<sup>142</sup> Ma'de'dono, *The Book of the Church Festivals According to the Ancient Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*, ed., A.Y. Samuel, ET by M. S. Barsom, New Jersey, 1984, 391.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 13-17.

<sup>144</sup> *Anonymous Hymn on Mary*, in British Library manuscript Add. 14520, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 99.

<sup>145</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 150.

the house of all races was constructed from nothing by Him.<sup>146</sup>

Mar Jacob uses the “chariot” in the sense of a heavenly chariot:

Look upon Him who sits upon the chariot of the heavenly  
 beings  
 while a young girl carries Him in her arms, yet He is one and  
 the same.<sup>147</sup>

Mar Jacob brings out this theme also in the lullabies of Mary. He presents Mary as identifying herself with the celestial chariot. The interest here is to highlight the divinity of the Son born of Mary, and to affirm the unity of the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. This is how he personifies the Cherub with Mary:

Give to my shoulders the strength and power of the Cherubs  
 so that they may escort you in a holy manner among the  
 poor.<sup>148</sup>

Mar Jacob’s second purpose in the imagery of the chariot is to present the virginity of Mary. In his homily *On the Annunciation* we read:

Joseph took her and brought her, filled with holiness, into his  
 house

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<sup>146</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 152; St. Ephrem in his commentary on Lk 1:35 asks why is not the name of the Father mentioned, but only that of the Son and the Holy Spirit. His answer is that it was fitting that the architect of the works of creation should come and raise up the house that had fallen, and that the hovering spirit should sanctify the buildings that were unclean. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron*, ET by C. McCarthy, 1§ 25, 53.

<sup>147</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 123; Cf. *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59; *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 20.

<sup>148</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 85.



while looking on her as the heavenly chariot.<sup>149</sup>

Here the reference to Mary as the celestial chariot occurred when Jacob spoke of her relationship to Joseph to whom she was engaged. Even when God appeared to Ezekiel, He remained a mystery far beyond Ezekiel's comprehension; parallel to that here, although legally Mary became Joseph's wife, Joseph and Mary did not engage in sexual relations, but they remained chaste. This becomes plausible when we read that Joseph did not look upon Mary "as a man on his wife", but "he looked on her as the high priest looks on the Holy of Holies."<sup>150</sup> Mar Jacob takes up this imagery to show that Joseph and Mary have observed the state of 'holiness in the consecrated state' (*qāddiṣuthâ*). In the early Syriac literature this referred primarily to the consecrated state of abstinence from sexual relations with one's spouse.<sup>151</sup>

Even though Mary is Joseph's lawful wife, because she has been set apart for a higher vocation, they abstained from marital relations. The glory of God which Ezekiel had seen from afar has now become present in the house of Joseph. The eternal God who was praised and glorified by the people has now taken human form in Mary. She becomes worthy of being honoured and respected by Joseph. Mar Jacob depicts Mary as a chariot:

Bestow upon my feet the vehemence of the eloquent wheels  
so that they may carry you solemnly on the land of Judea as it  
has pleased you.

Adorn my knees with the Sapphire of pure appearance  
so they can endure under the vehement power of your joy.

O Son of the King, give great strength to the lap of your  
mother

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<sup>149</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

<sup>150</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

<sup>151</sup> S. Brock, *Spirituality in Syriac Tradition*, 53; In Syrian understanding it was not strange to call married people chaste. For example a Verse Homily on Mary and Joseph, speaks about Joseph as father of five sons (line 65) and in the same homily he is qualified as chaste (line 37). Cf. S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 148-149.

and as (on) the chariot with great power may you be honoured  
on it.<sup>152</sup>

Again, in another passage Mar Jacob refers to the chariot as a ‘royal vehicle’- Mary becomes the chariot of the King, Christ.

The King sat on the chariot full of strength  
to go out and to visit the house of his servants in diligence.<sup>153</sup>

What Mar Jacob tries to communicate through the figure of the chariot also pertains to Christ, who is born of Mary. This helps us to understand that Mariology is not to be treated as a particular topic in systematic theology, but is closely related to the theology of Incarnation. Mar Jacob’s depiction of Mary goes hand in hand with his narration of Christ. Here the chariot is referred to as “flaming chariot”:

All of Him sits on the flaming chariot;  
all of Him dwells in the womb of flesh- He is one and the  
same.<sup>154</sup>

The one who was revealed to the people in the celestial chariot is the eternal God. The one whom Mary bore was the Incarnate God. The same God who revealed Himself to Israel is the One whom Mary bore in her womb.<sup>155</sup> So, this verse maintains the unity

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<sup>152</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 85.

<sup>153</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 63.

<sup>154</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 67; Cf. *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 67; *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 65.

<sup>155</sup> In the early centuries of Christianity, there had been questions regarding the pre-existence of the humanity of Christ. But the Fathers have denied this assumption by teaching that Christ received human nature only in his incarnation from the Virgin Mary. But Origen, (+ 253) influenced by Platonic philosophy, held the idea of the pre-existence of Christ’s soul even before the incarnation, which was united to the body conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Cf. L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, 72-73.



of the Godhead as it is in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Many heretics held that the God of the Old Testament was cruel and not merciful; but that the God of New Testament was loving and merciful. But Mar Jacob, along with the Church Fathers, holds that it is the same God who created the world and redeemed it in His great love.<sup>156</sup> That God created the world through the Son who had come for its redemption is a theme of the feast of Nativity. In short, Mar Jacob explicitly used the symbol of the chariot in the sense of a royal chariot,<sup>157</sup> in the sense of a flaming chariot<sup>158</sup> and in the sense of a heavenly chariot.<sup>159</sup>

#### 6.4. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Celestial Chariot”

There are two interpretations to the symbol of the “celestial chariot.” First, it refers to the real motherhood of Mary who bore the eternal Son of God in her womb. This symbol represents the theophany of God to Israel, whose magnificence was unreachable for the people. Secondly, the symbol of the celestial chariot bears witness to Mary’s virginity. Mary, with regard to her legal relationship was Joseph’s bride. But since Mary and Joseph

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<sup>156</sup> Irenaeus, in *Adversus Haereses* writes that creation is the work of God with his two “hands”, that is the Son and the Spirit. In Irenaeus’ view, there is a close connection between the creation and redemption. This connection becomes explicit when the Creator and the Redeemer are identified in the person of Christ. “For God did not stand in need of these [beings] in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously He made all things; [...]” Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, ET in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, 487-488.

<sup>157</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 85.

<sup>158</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 67; 80, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 65.

<sup>159</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59; Cf. *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 20.



participated in a greater mission, that is to be the mother and foster-father of the child, they did not engage in any conjugal union. This symbol stands for Mary's virginity and Joseph respected her as the celestial chariot of Ezekiel. The splendour of Mar Jacob's insight reaches its peak when he says that Mary's participation in the divine mysteries is greater than that of the chariot of the glorious vision.

Your portion is greater than the glorious chariot of the visions,  
because that one whom you carry, behold He grows in you,  
yet enriches you.<sup>160</sup>

Mar Jacob's consideration of the symbol of the chariot illustrates how Mary becomes the dwelling place of God. Instead of the chariot of the temple which represented God's presence, God really becomes present in Mary.

That chariot with its variegated appearances<sup>161</sup> is more  
insignificant  
because it carried your Son in a type, but you in reality.<sup>162</sup>

In summation, on the one hand, the biblical references of the "chariot" remind us of God's blessings for His people (Ps 65:11), and His presence among His people (1 Chron 28:18) and man's ascent to God (2 Kings 2:11). On the other hand, because Mary bears Christ in her womb, she represents all these mysteries more fully for she brings God's salvific presence among humans. She also becomes the vehicle of God's blessings for all of humanity. The one who realized Mary's blessings cried out: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked" (Lk 11:27). This brings us to the next symbol - the "new well".

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<sup>160</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 80.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Ezek 1:26.

<sup>162</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 65.

## 7. The “New Well” (*bīro ḥdtho* بئرو حدثو)

In presenting the mystery of Mary, Mar Jacob makes use of the imagery of the “new well” that reflects the divine motherhood of Mary. She is the stream whence flows the water which satiates the thirsty ones. This theme was made use of very extensively in the Syrian Church especially surrounding the feast of nativity. Homilies and poems on Mary also emphasized that from Mary the fountain, water flowed for the thirsty world and those who tasted it gave forth fruit a hundred-fold.<sup>163</sup> She was the source from whom originated the cause of divine grace.

### 7.1. The Biblical Background of the “New Well”

In the Old Testament the ‘well’ is the symbol of the saving love of God, of His presence and of His blessings. The saving love of God is best expressed in Hagar’s experience, in her miserable condition, she became homeless and God called her back from her homelessness. Interestingly this event happened before a spring of water in the wilderness and God promised “I will so multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude. [...] because the LORD had given heed to your affliction” (Gen 16:10-11). Hagar was astonished that even after seeing God she was alive and the Bible says that thereafter “the well was called Beer-láhai-roi” (the well of one who sees and lives). There is a striking parallel in the New Testament. But first I would like to consider the repetition of the same experience in Hagar’s life itself. Genesis chapter 21 tells us that she once again became homeless, this time with her child. Being abandoned and alone, she had the most difficult time of her life, the water she stored in her leather bag was finished and her child was about to die of thirst. The mother could not bear to witness this sad event and she turned her face away from the dying child. But God did not abandon her. Once again God intervened and brought the child to life. He answered the crying, “fear not; for God

<sup>163</sup> Anonymous Verse homily on the Virgin Mary, ed., E. Beck, *Nachtrage zu Ephraem Syrus*, CSCO 363, Scriptorum Syri 159; Louven, 1975, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 144-145.

has heard the voice of the lad where he is. [...] Then God opened her eyes she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink” (Gen 21:17-19).

Now let us see the parallels in the New Testament. Hagar’s experience tells us about the saving love of a God who intervened and called back from homelessness to home and death to life. In the New Testament we see that Jesus intervened in the life of the Samaritan woman who had gone away from her “Father’s home” and died through sin and Jesus brought her back to life and to her heavenly Father’s house. It is noteworthy that Jesus in this situation introduces Himself as the “living water” (Jn 4:10-11), and that the event took place near *Jacob’s well* (Jn 4:6). As in the case of Hagar, the Samaritan woman also met God, and experienced His saving love near the *well*.

Another important occasion in the Old Testament regarding the “well” as a symbol of God’s blessing, is in the life of Isaac. Genesis chapter 26 gives us the account of Isaac’s struggle with the Philistines over digging a “well.” When finally the dispute was settled and Isaac dug a well for himself and for his people he considered it as a blessing of God. Therefore he called this well “Rehoboth, saying, ‘For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land’” (Gen 26:22).

Another memorable occasion in connection with the “well” is from the life of David. The Second Book of Samuel chapter 23 entitles this account as the last words of David and 1 Chronicles 11:17-19 repeats the same account. During his campaign against the Philistines, David expressed his peculiar wish. He asked his people, “[...] Longingly, O that some one would give me water to drink from the *well of Bethlehem* which is by the gate!” (2 Sam 23:13-15 [my italics]). David’s people who were loyal and courageous fulfilled the wish of their king by bringing *water from the well of Bethlehem*, though it was guarded by the Philistines. David was really moved by the loyalty and love of his people. He was in a dilemma. He repented of his selfishness that in order to fulfil his wish he had risked the life of his people. “[...] But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the LORD, and said, “Far



Give it from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" (2 Sam 23:16-17). The whole story of David's wish to drink water from the well of Bethlehem seems to be a prefigure of what was going to be fulfilled in the New Testament. Jesus the Son of David, born in Bethlehem, later declared that He Himself was the "living water" (Jn 4: 10). He adds, "the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). David longed to drink the water from the well of Bethlehem, but he could not. The unfulfilled wish of King David is well reflected in the words of Jesus: "Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it" (Mt 13:17). Jesus came into the world as the "Living water", and fulfilled the promise of the heavenly Father to save all humanity from the death of sin and to quench the thirst for eternal life.

Another important reference to the well in the Old Testament is about "Jacob's well", described in Genesis chapter 29. There was a large *stone* over the mouth of the well and the shepherds would roll the *stone* from it and "water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well" (Gen 29:1-3). Rachel came to this well to water the flock, and here Jacob met his bride (Gen 29:1-3). This remains as a prefigure of Christ the "Living Water." For, it is at the closed tomb of the Lord that the Church meets her bridegroom, the source of life, the 'Living water.' St. John writes that on the first day of the week when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb she saw that the *stone* had been taken from the tomb (Jn 20:1). Just as when Rachel came to the well the *stone* was removed by Jacob, so also in the case of Magdalene, the stone was taken away by the angel (Mt 28:2).

The above analysis shows that the well is a powerful symbol of God's presence, saving love and blessing. Mar Jacob exploited the effectiveness of this symbol in narrating Mary's role in God's salvific plan. The following section sheds more light on this aspect.

## 7.2. Mary: the “New Well” - the Source of “Living Water”

Mar Jacob, in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* calls Mary the “new well.” Mar Jacob sings:

The New Well from which gushed forth Living Water,  
and without being hewn out, she generated rushing streams to  
the *thirsty world*.<sup>164</sup>

According to Mar Jacob from Mary flows *Living Water* to the *thirsty world*. The present thesis wishes to illustrate that the stories of the “well” we have seen in the analysis of biblical references prefigure Mary. The persons involved in the stories were expressing, either directly or indirectly their thirst for “water.” God gave water to Hagar’s dying child in the wilderness (Gen 21:17-19). David desired to drink water from the *well of Bethlehem* (2 Sam 23:13-15). Rachel also came to the well in search of water. The Samaritan woman who was spiritually thirsty wanted to drink the ‘living water’ (Jn 4:10). All these seem to prefigure Christ the ‘living water’, Mary, the “new well” who bore Christ, and the thirsty world which longed for the divine love and peace. Mar Jacob presents Mary as the “new well” from which *Living Water* flows. In the analysis of the biblical texts we have seen that there is a parallel between *Jacob’s well* and Mary, for Christ the living water flowed from her.

Ezekiel speaks of a river which issues from below the threshold of the temple (Ezek 47:1-12). He described this water as the life giving source, for when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea it will become fresh, every living creature which swarms will live, there will be plenty of fish, so where the river goes everything will live (Ezek 47:8-9). Thus the river becomes a blessing to the whole of creation. This theme is again taken up in the healing of the paralysed man who had been ill for thirty eight years and who to be cured had to step into the water first when it was troubled (Jn 5:1-16). Jesus, who revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman as the

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<sup>164</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xvii.



“Living Water”, cured him without letting him step into the water of the pool.<sup>165</sup>

The biblical account of Jacob’s well which was depicted as being covered by a big stone reminds us of the tomb of Jesus. Both women, Rachel and Mary Magdalene are looking for water. One seeks water to quench a physical thirst, and the other “Living water” to quench a spiritual thirst.

The rock which brought forth streams cannot be compared to  
because living waters go forth from you to the whole world.<sup>166</sup>

From Mary gushed the living water, Christ. The imagery of the fountain is drawn from the miracle of water gushing forth from the rock in the desert when Moses struck it (Ex 17:6). The Syriac tradition looks at the “stream out of the rock” as a typology which was fulfilled in Mary by her conception of Christ. We quote below a Syriac hymn on Mary which says that here, instead of Moses who struck on the rock, stands Mary who spoke with Gabriel. The hymn also says that much more than this rock the virgin, by giving birth poured forth living waters, a fountain which slaked its thirst.

Much more than this rock has the virgin, by giving birth,  
poured forth living waters –  
a fountain from which the thirsty land of humanity  
has slaked its thirst:  
a draft which has flowed from the Father  
at which all creation rejoices.

By David’s daughter did Gabriel take his stand:  
with her there spoke this spiritual being  
as with the rock Moses had done of old.

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<sup>165</sup> The Latin Church gives these two readings on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the Lenten season. Cf. *The Weekday Missal A New Edition, Weekday Masses for the Proper of Season. Ordinary Time. The Proper of Saints Occasional Masses. Masses for the Dead Complete with Readings in One Volume*, 205-207.

<sup>166</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 80.



She then conceived and gave birth in her virginity  
to Him in whose symbol  
Moses performed all these novel things.<sup>167</sup>

### 7.3. Theological Significance of the “New Well”

Mar Jacob’s interest lay in the contrast between Eve and Mary. Instead of sin brought forth by Eve, Mary caused the fountain to pour forth blessings to humanity. Her role, in bringing Christ into the world, made her worthy of being called the “new well.” To express this in the words of S. Brock; “Mary corresponds to the Church as the source of the sacraments, in that she herself gave birth to Christ, the very fountain-head of these sacraments.”<sup>168</sup>

In the spirituality of the Syriac tradition the aspect of listening to the word of God has been given great priority. For example, Ephrem in the *Hymns On Virginity*, speaks very highly of the Samaritan woman, for she, by listening to Christ, attained salvation. He speaks about the Samaritan woman’s listening to Christ as “drinking the source that gives drink to the world.”<sup>169</sup> Christ invites each and every follower who believes in Him, to drink from Him. Jesus speaks of the believer; “out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38). In the Gospel of John, Jesus presents himself as the source of Living water (Jn 4:7-15). Mary’s faith and her promise to co-operate with God at the Annunciation enabled her to conceive and give birth to Christ, the source of living water.

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<sup>167</sup> *Anonymous Hymn on Mary*, in British Library Manuscript, Add. 14520, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 100-101.

<sup>168</sup> S. Brock, “Mary and the Eucharist: an Oriental Perspective”, *Studies in Syriac Spirituality*, in *SCS Vol. XIII*, ed., J. Velliyan, Poona, (1988), 39.

<sup>169</sup> Mary, the thirsty land in Nazarath,  
conceived our Lord by her ear.  
You, too, O woman thirsting for water,  
conceived the Son by your hearing.  
Blessed are your ears that drank the source  
that gave drink to the world.  
Mary planted him in the manger,  
But you [planted him] in the ears of His hearers.  
Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 23:5, ET by K. Mcvey, 362.

Mary attained the status of the “new well” only in relation to Christ. A. Schmemmann has rightly affirmed that it is from Christ that she received her image:

Oh, this doesn't mean that her (Mary's) image somehow eclipses the image of Christ, or that she is presented to Christianity as an additional object of faith set apart from Christ. Not at all, for it is from Christ and from Him alone that we receive this image as a gift, as the unfolding of all that His teaching and calling means.<sup>170</sup>

The image of Christ as ‘Living Water’ is a major theme in the New Testament, especially His words “who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” go in parallel with his invitation to the thirsty ones to come and drink from Him. To present this image of Christ to the world and to give Christ, the living water, who is the source of peace and rest is the mission of all Christians in today's world. Mary stands as a perfect model for all Christians who are called to realize this divine mission in their own lives. Mar Jacob's typology of Mary as a “new well” forcefully presents this Mariological aspect. In summation, the task of every Christian is nothing but to become a “new well” who contains and gives Christ to the thirsty world.

#### 8. The Symbol of the “Tabernacle” (*š'kintho & qubtho* مقدسا - مقبلا)

The dedication of the Tabernacle and Moses' conversation with God in the Tabernacle gave significance and perseverance to the Israelites as they journeyed to the promised land (Ex 40:1-38). Mar Jacob wished to theologically present the encounter of Mary, the recipient of divine revelation with Elizabeth, her kinswoman. Mary had received the most sublime revelation of God and went to Judea to share with Elizabeth, the sacred presence she carried within her womb and to bask in Elizabeth's blessing. Mar Jacob considers

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<sup>170</sup> A. Schmemmann, *Celebration of Faith, Sermons*, Vol. 3, *The Virgin Mary*, New York, 1995, 21.

Mary's journey as parallel to that of Israel. Mary went ahead like the Tabernacle with the Majesty in it.

### 8.1. The Biblical Foundation of the “Tabernacle”

Israel considered the Tabernacle as an important element of worship because it contained everything that the Israelites considered as the symbols of God's presence. The Tabernacle is also referred to as a “tent.” The Letter to the Hebrews recalls the image of the Tabernacle:

For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant, above it were the Cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat (Heb 9:2-5).

Chapters 25, 26, 27, 35, 36, 38, 39 and 40 of Exodus deal with the construction of the tabernacle. God said to Moses: “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst (Ex 25:8). And they made the tabernacle according to the pattern that God had shown him. This detailed instruction for constructing the Tabernacle shows that the work was to be meticulously carried out. When it was anointed with oil, it would become ‘holy’ (Ex 40:9). The Bible presents three terminologies in reference to the tabernacle: 1) the tabernacle of the tent of meeting (Ex 39:40; 40:2; 40:62; 1 Chron 6:32), 2) the tabernacle of testimony (Num 1: 53; 10: 11) and 3) the tabernacle of the Lord (Num 31:30, 31:47, 1 Chron 21:29; 2 Chron 1:5).

Whenever a cloud covered the tent of meeting, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34). “On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony; and at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning” (Num 9:15). The abiding of the cloud upon the tabernacle and its being taken away was very



decisive for Israel's pilgrimage towards the promised land (Ex 40: 35-36). In short, their journey was centred around the tabernacle.

## 8.2. The Symbol of the "Tabernacle" and Mary

In the biblical analysis of the tabernacle we have seen three terminologies referring to the tabernacle: 1) the tabernacle as the tent of meeting (Ex 39: 40, 40:2, 40: 62, 1 Chron 6:32), 2) the tabernacle of testimony (Num 1: 53, 10:11), and 3) the tabernacle of the Lord (Num 31: 30, 31: 47, 1 Chron 21:29, 2 Chron 1:5). When we analyse the word "tabernacle", there are two Syriac words that Jacob used *qubtho* (ܩܒܬܗ) and *š<sup>e</sup>kintho* (ܫܟܢܬܗ). The word *qubtho* ܩܒܬܗ means umbrella, canopy, pavilion and tabernacle,<sup>171</sup> and *š<sup>e</sup>kintho* ܫܟܢܬܗ is the word for the visible glory of the Divine Presence.<sup>172</sup> Of these, Mar Jacob used (*š<sup>e</sup>kintho*)<sup>173</sup> three times and (*qubtho*)<sup>174</sup> twice in the homily *On the Nativity of our Redeemer*.

As we have seen in the biblical text regarding the Tabernacle, God willed to dwell among His people (Ex 25:8), and after its construction it was to be anointed so that it would become 'holy' (Ex 40:9). Mary was the Tabernacle chosen by God from among man, and Mar Jacob describes it thus: "the building which the serpent pulled down, Gabriel built up."<sup>175</sup> If the building built by Gabriel is "Mary, the tabernacle" it was to be anointed to become 'holy' and Mar Jacob says "He (the Holy Spirit) sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among women." So in all respects, Mar Jacob calls her the "Tabernacle" which was prefigured in the Old Testament. The text below shows God's presence among the people in the tabernacle:

<sup>171</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 491.

<sup>172</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 576.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 53; Cf. *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 65; Cf. *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 66.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 43.

<sup>175</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 30.

She proceeded on foot, the tabernacle ascended with the  
Majesty in it  
in order to visit the ambassador, the son of the poor, in his  
house.<sup>176</sup>

Since the tabernacle contained the ark of the testimony, that is the presence of God, it is very apt to say that Mary proceeded like the Tabernacle.<sup>177</sup> And once Mary is in the house of Zechariah, his household looks upon her as the tabernacle of the Lord:

They looked on her as the habitation of the Godhead;  
and she was regarded by them as an ark full of fire.<sup>178</sup>

The real indwelling of the Son in Mary is explained by Jacob with a sense of “wonder” as the Unlimited One limits Himself.

Do you have your kingdom in the hidden tabernacle higher  
than the principalities  
or in the cave folded over by rock does your authority  
reside?<sup>179</sup>

God’s presence in Mary is different from His presence in the tabernacle. For, in the Tabernacle the presence was witnessed by the cloud, and in Mary God’s presence was the human form that He took. Because the mystery of God’s descending and dwelling in Mary is awesome and beyond man’s comprehension, Mar Jacob

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<sup>176</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 63.

<sup>177</sup> In Mar Jacob’s homilies, Mary is the tabernacle which ascended with the Majesty to the house of Elizabeth. The Syro Oriental Church has a different approach in the understanding of Tabernacle. In the prayer of the night office for the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary after Christmas the Church prays: “In her womb she bore fire, and in her body she solemnly carried a tabernacle [...]” As quoted by P. Podipara, in “The Mariology of the Church of the East,” in *CO 2* (1981), 165-182.

<sup>178</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 53.

<sup>179</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 43.

Whenever the mind beheld that heaven is full of your  
greatness,  
it saw your Shekinah dwelling in the womb; it is troubled.<sup>181</sup>

### 8.3. The Theological Significance of the “Tabernacle”

<sup>181</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 66. In the preceding passage of the homily, Mar Jacob wrote that minds and intellects are small to describe the Lord. That one cannot describe the Lord in words, is the reason why he says that the mind is troubled.



Eucharist.<sup>182</sup> Syrian writers, in their commentary on liturgy, many times saw a connection between the Epiclesis and the Annunciation. For example, Moshe bar Kepha wrote:

[...] as He came down into the womb of the holy Virgin Mary - according as the angel said: "The Holy Spirit shall come", etc. - and made the body which was from the Virgin the body of God the Word, so He comes down upon the bread and wine which are upon the altar, and makes them that body and blood of God the Word which was from the Virgin.<sup>183</sup>

We have seen that Mary and the Eucharist, because of God's dwelling in them became the Tabernacle in the Incarnation and the Tabernacle in the Church respectively. In the *Hymn on Virginity* St. Ephrem spoke of Joseph and John the Baptist as honouring the Tabernacle of Mary.<sup>184</sup> Another hymn on Mary speaks of her as the chosen Tabernacle:

[...]  
for you have been chosen to become the tabernacle  
to the Lord of Majesty who is coming down from on high  
to visit the depth below  
and to raise Adam up to the Garden.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. P. Yousif, "La vierge Marie et l'eucharistie chez saint Ephrem de Nisibe et dans la patristique syriaque antérieure", in *Etudes Mariales* 36:7 (1978 – 1980), 64.

<sup>183</sup> Moshe Bar Kepha, in *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy*, R. H. Connolly and H. W. Codrington, London, 1913, 60.

<sup>184</sup> Joseph and also John honoured  
Your mother's womb as a symbol.  
It is the symbol of the Tabernacle, the temporal  
Tabernacle,  
in which Emmanuel was dwelling.  
Both of them persist in admonishing us  
not to belittle God in His temples.  
A dispute! How frightful that by our investigation  
we should measure that immeasurable Height!

Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 25:11, ET by K. Mcvey, 373.

<sup>185</sup> *A Hymn on Mary*, ed., T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, III, Malines, 1889, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 87.

Aphrahat in the *Demonstration* XII, spoke of the tabernacle which Moses set up as a 'temporal tabernacle' (*maškān zabnâ* مَسْكَنَ أَظْنَا) because it served only for a limited time where they might offer sacrifice and oblations in order to obtain remission of sins. But Jesus, who died and rose up, restored the tabernacle of David. In this tabernacle, the life is promised to us and in it our sins are expiated.<sup>186</sup> In this perspective it refers to Christ's personal body in which he redeemed the world.

As we have seen, once God dwells in the tabernacle which is made of ordinary things, it is transformed into something holy. Mary, an ordinary person is transformed into a holy person by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Through her the door to holiness is opened for the whole of humanity. This same mystery of transformation takes place in the Eucharist. S. Brock says:

The descent of the Spirit upon Mary, who bears Christ as the fruit of her co-operation, thus finds close correspondence with the descent of the Spirit upon the Bread and the Wine - provided their recipients are as open to the action of the Spirit as was Mary - in turn bear fruit in them as they are transformed into men and women who are truly 'conformed to Christ.'

There is thus a striking complementarity between the Annunciation and the Epiclesis in the Eucharist. To bring out the point, one could put the matter in somewhat bizarre fashion and say that for God to become part of the material world and to take on flesh and blood, the Holy Spirit has to invite - one could almost say 'invoke' - Mary for her co-operation; whereas, for the bread and wine, representatives of the material world, to take on their new vivifying and sanctifying role as the Body and Blood of Christ, the priest as representative of the faithful has to invoke the Holy Spirit, who then effects this.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Cf. Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, XII, PS 1, 523-526.

<sup>187</sup> S. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist: an Oriental Perspective", in *SSS* Vol. XIII, 55.

In short, the symbol of the tabernacle refers to God's presence in the tabernacle in the Old Testament, His presence in Mary in the Incarnation and His presence in the Eucharist in the Church today.

## 9. The Symbol of the “Cloud” of Mount Sinai (*enōno 'al tursīnāi* سَنَّا لَا هَمُ هَمَلْ )

Mary is compared to God's protective cloud, for God dwells in her. In using the symbol of the cloud, Mar Jacob is referring back to events in which God's presence was manifested in the Old Testament.

### 9.1. Biblical Foundation of the Symbol of the “Cloud”

The “cloud of Mount Sinai” is another awe-inspiring image of God in the Old Testament. This symbol could be seen as: 1) the sign of the Lord's glory that filled the tabernacle, for we read: “And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex 40:35). 2) The symbol of the cloud stands for God's protective power over the Israelites. After delivering Israel from Egypt, God not only promised them His protection, but also moved ahead of them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along their journey (Ex 13:21). They needed His protection and Fatherly care. He assured them of His presence in the form of a cloud. In the Old Testament, the transcendent God manifested Himself to the people in cloud and thunder (Ex 19:16-20). 3) The symbol of the cloud is seen as the manifestation of God (Ex 20:21). Before handing over the commandments, God appeared to the people on Mount Sinai. “And Mount of Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly” (Ex 19:18). This points to the presence of God with the Israelites especially at particular moments of their history. The cloud reminded them of God's presence and it became a reminder that they should worship God. “And when the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door” (Ex 33:9-10).



The biblical analysis of the symbol of the “cloud” points to God’s glory, His protective power and manifestation among the people. Let us see how Mar Jacob makes use of this symbol.<sup>188</sup>

## 9.2. The Symbol of the “Cloud” and Joseph’s Attitude towards Mary

As we have seen in the biblical analysis, the symbol of the ‘cloud’ stands for God’s presence in the Old Testament (Ex 33:9-10). Referring to God’s presence in Mary, Mar Jacob calls Mary the “cloud.” On seeing the cloud, the Israelites became conscious of God’s presence and this prompted them to pray, Mar Jacob presents Joseph here, who on seeing God’s presence in Mary begins to adore God. Let us examine a beautiful text of Mar Jacob in which he depicts Mary as a cloud.

He was loving her and marvelling at her and bowing to her;  
he was honouring her and reverencing her and serving her.  
He was regarding her like *the cloud* over Mt. Sinai, because  
within her the Power of the Godhead was dwelling.<sup>189</sup>

This quotation is taken from Mar Jacob’s homily *On the Annunciation*, and the context is the angel’s revelation to Joseph in a dream. Joseph, who had earlier thought of renouncing Mary, “was serving and adoring and honouring her and being glad before her, extolling, confessing and serving her in a holy manner.”<sup>190</sup> She becomes a reminder to Joseph to worship God just like the Israelites

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<sup>188</sup> Imitating the manifestations of God in the Old Testament, there have been stories in the apocryphals, of a cloud being formed at the time of the nativity of Christ. Reminiscent of God’s appearance in the cloud in the Old Testament, the apocryphal, ‘Protoevangelium of James’ has a narration of a luminous cloud which overshadowed the cave when Mary gave birth to her son. And the midwife who saw this utters: My soul has been magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen strange things - because salvation has been brought forth to Israel. Cf. *Protoevangelium of James*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, 365.

<sup>189</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

<sup>190</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 76.

worshipped God on seeing the cloud when Moses was speaking with God. To describe Joseph's attitude, Mar Jacob uses the phrase: "I adore the womb" (*sōged no lo lkarso* ܡܨܝܕܐ ܠܢܐ ܠܡܥܝܢܐ).<sup>191</sup> The term used in Syriac to refer to divine worship is *sged* ܡܨܝܕܐ. Seeing the Lord of kings in Mary's womb, Joseph adores Mary. In presenting the change of Joseph's mentality from renouncing Mary, to accepting and honouring her, Mar Jacob reveres the divine maternity of Mary.

Mar Jacob, when speaking of the visit of Mary to Elizabeth says that Zechariah the priest "trembles." As we have seen in Exodus 40:35, the cloud referred to the glory of the Lord. The present thesis considers that it is upon seeing the glory of the Lord in Mary that Zechariah who ministered in the Holy of Holies, begins to fear and tremble. Here are Mar Jacob's words:

Because your appearance is awesome like the thick darkness  
on Mount Sinai,  
the old priest *trembles* when he looks on you.<sup>192</sup>

As we have seen in the biblical context, Mar Jacob applied the symbol of the "cloud" as the inaccessible nature of God.

Your womb is *more awesome* than the cloud upon the mount  
Sinai.  
For, behold, in you resides the tabernacle [Shechina] of the  
Exalted One in a holy manner.<sup>193</sup>

In the Old Testament the cloud was the sign which revealed God's presence, and the very day the tabernacle was set up it was witnessed by the people (Num 9:15). In comparison to the cloud, the symbol of God's presence, Mar Jacob compares Mary's womb to the cloud of God's presence, and the inadequacy of the comparison is solved by saying "your womb is *more awesome*."

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<sup>191</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 75.

<sup>192</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 54.

<sup>193</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 65.



### 9.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Cloud”

The symbol of the cloud signified the glory, the protective presence and the manifestation of God. All these become significant in Mary for God dwells in her. The role of Mary in conceiving and giving birth to Jesus was an active one, for an involuntary conception is an incomplete conception, and it entails an incomplete motherhood. But Mary's reply “let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) is the expression of her readiness to conceive the Word both physically and spiritually.<sup>194</sup> What the Israelites understood from the symbol of the cloud becomes really present in Mary.

The following hymn is an anonymous hymn on Mary which uses the symbol of the cloud for meditative purposes. This hymn extols Mary's glory by saying that she is like the cloud over Mount Sinai because the Lord dwells in her. The difference in “His coming down to Mary” and to “Mount Sinai” is expressed thus:

Mary's bosom is like the cloud over mount Sinai  
Wherein resided the Lord of the heights:  
A great wonder it was, for the mountain shook,  
whereas Mary's bosom did not stir at all.<sup>195</sup>

The symbol of the cloud really brings out the presence of God in Mary. The cloud reminded the Israelites of the glory of the Lord, the protective sign of the Lord and the manifestation of God, and these became really present in a human being, in Mary. In other words, using the symbol of the cloud Mar Jacob beautifully portrays Mary's divine motherhood.

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<sup>194</sup> In summarizing patristic teachings about Mary first conceiving Christ with her soul through faith and then conceiving Him in her womb E. LaVerdiere writes: “Mary is more blessed for grasping faith in Christ than for conceiving his flesh; the maternal relationship would not have profited Mary had she not borne Christ in her heart more happily than in her womb.” E. Laverdiere, “Mary”, in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 736.

<sup>195</sup> *Anonymous Hymn on Mary*, in British Library Manuscript Add. 14520, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 98.



## Conclusion

What I have dealt with so far in this chapter can be delineated as follows: 1) Mar Jacob's Mariological homilies concentrated on the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood. 2) He recognized that ordinary language is insufficient in dealing with the unfathomable mystery of her divine motherhood. 3) Therefore he depended on poetic language and its style. 4) Mar Jacob very effectively uses Old Testament symbols to unveil the divine mystery. 5) Thus he acquires a two-fold purpose that is, he beautifully explains the mystery and establishes that the salvific acts realized in and through Mary are prefigured in the Old Testament.

As I have pointed out, Mar Jacob's poetic narration of Mary's motherhood emphasizes not only the mystery aspect of the Incarnation, but also affirms that Mariology as such derives its status from Christology. The symbols he employed clearly indicate that Mary receives honour and greatness just because the Incarnate God is born from her. The analysis indicates that all the symbols such as the ark, the Tabernacle of the Lord, the cloud that covered over it, the temple, the castle and the chariot assume their status because of the One who is present in them. Mary is also elevated to her greatness solely because of the One who dwelt in her.

Another important perspective of Mar Jacob's homily is the theological instruction it offered to the Christian. His portrayal of Mary remains as a hope and model to a Christian who shares the same vocation of Mary. This vocation is nothing other than experiencing the presence of Christ in oneself and giving this Christ to the world. The following chapters will deal more on these issues.

## CHAPTER THREE

# THE VIRGINITY OF MARY IN THE HOMILIES OF JACOB OF SERUGH

### Introduction

In this chapter we will deal with Mar Jacob's conception of the virginity of Mary. The main points Mar Jacob highlights are that Mary was a virgin before (*virginitas ante partum*), during (*virginitas in partum*) and after parturition (*virginitas post partum*). Mary remained a virgin even in giving birth to a child, for she had not given birth to a human being who could not preserve her virginity, but to God; who is the foundation of her virginity. The divine intervention in the Incarnation of Christ is characterized by the fact that Mary conceived Christ virginally. The infancy narratives of Mathew (Mt 1:18) and Luke (Lk 1:31-35) illustrate the mystery of Mary's virginity.

There are some similarities between Mar Jacob's analysis of the themes of Mary's "maternity" and her "virginity." In both, he uses symbols as an efficient means of explanation and analysis. Moreover, both themes are treated in relation to the Incarnation.

Before entering into the study of the symbols of virginity, it is good to analyse how Mary's virginity was understood in the early Church in connection with the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. Long before acknowledging the divine motherhood of Mary, the Church believed in her virginal birth-giving. The explicit references to Mary's *virginitas ante partum* are: Mary's question to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" and the angel's response: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). The Scripture gives references to Mary's virginity in conception; for example, the verse,

“he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus” (Mt 1:24-25) excludes sexual relations between Joseph and Mary before Jesus’ birth. The determining factor for the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity is a Church tradition, because it goes beyond what is said in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Early References to Mary’s Virginity

From the earliest centuries of Christianity there have been attempts to understand Mary’s virginity. The accounts of Mary’s miraculous birthgiving gave impetus to the belief in Mary’s *virginitas in partu*.<sup>2</sup> The Church Fathers of the early centuries, reflecting on her virginity believed that Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations after the birth of Jesus, which gave rise to the concepts of *virginitas post partum*. The early text which refers to Mary’s virginity is found in the letter of St. Ignatius (+c.110) to the Smyrnaeans: Jesus is ‘truly born of a virgin.’<sup>3</sup> Justin martyr (+165) interpreted the virgin birth as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies especially that of Isaiah 7:10-14; the “sign” referred to in this text is that the first born of all creatures had assumed His body from the virginal womb and, in reality had become a child.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R.E. Brown, et al., *Mary in the New Testament*, New York, 1978, 292.

<sup>2</sup> *The Odes of Solomon* contain a passage describing the miraculous birth of Christ, in which the mother had not experienced birthpangs:

The Womb of the Virgin took (it),  
and she received conception and gave birth.  
So the Virgin became a mother with great mercies.  
And she labored and bore the Son but without pain,  
because it did not occur without purpose.  
And she did not seek a midwife,  
because he caused her to give life.

*The Odes of Solomon*, 19:6-10, ET by J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, 752.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius Of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, I:1, ET in *The Fathers of the Church: The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1, ET by F. X. Glimm, et al., Washington, 1981, 118.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Justin, *The First Apology of Justin*, 1, 33, ET in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, 174.



At the close of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the virgin birth of Christ was regarded as an absolutely essential part of Christian belief by the Christian Church in all parts of the known Christian world.<sup>5</sup> Ignatius of Antioch considered the virginity of Mary as one of the essential facts in the understanding of Christ.<sup>6</sup> The Church Fathers like Irenaeus (+c.200)<sup>7</sup> and Tertullian<sup>8</sup> have all emphasized the virginal birth of Christ.

Coming to the Syrian Fathers, we see a reference to Mary's virginity in the writings of Aphrahat. Christ is born of Mary from the tribe of the house of David, by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was called the foster father of Jesus in as much as He is not from his

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Cf. T. J. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Michigan, 1965, 3.

By the time of Ignatius of Antioch, the virginity of Mary had already been established. Yet when he was refuting the docetists, he writes: "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was according to God's dispensation, the fruit of Mary's womb, of the seed of David; He was born and baptized in order that He might make water holy by His passion. The maidenhood of Mary and her child-bearing and also the death of the Lord were hidden from the prince of this world-three resounding mysteries wrought in the silence of God." Ignatius Of Antioch, *Ephesians*, xviii. 2-xix.1, ET in *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 1, 94.

Irenaeus gives much importance to the faith which the apostles and their disciples handed down to the Church spread throughout the world. When explaining the content of faith, he includes Christ's birth from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. "[...] the faith in one God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was enfleshed for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the economies, the coming, the birth from a Virgin, [...]" Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I. 10, 1.

In the *Rule of Faith*, Tertullian also wrote on the same aspect regarding the virginity of Mary: "que ce Verbe fut appelé son fils, qu'au nom de Dieu il apparut sous diverses figures aux patriarches, qu'il se fit entendre en tout temps par les prophètes, enfin qu'il descendit par l'esprit et la puissance de Dieu le père dans la Marie, qu'il devint chair dans son sein et que nê d'elle 'sa vie devint celle de Jésus-Christ.'" Tertullian, *De Praescriptione, Haereticorum* XIII. 3, *SChr.* 46, 106.

sperm.<sup>9</sup> Concerning the angel's greeting: "Peace be with you blessed" to Mary, he says that Gabriel gave peace and brought the blessed fruit that was planted in the womb of Mary.<sup>10</sup>

St. Ephrem, who preceded Mar Jacob by 80 years convincingly argues about Mary's perpetual virginity. He compares Christ's virginal birth with the miraculous birth of Adam. St. Ephrem writes in his commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: "The virgin's conception teaches that he, who begot Adam without intercourse from the virgin earth, also fashioned the Second Adam without intercourse in the virgin's womb."<sup>11</sup> Concerning Mary's virginity in parturition, he writes: "The virgin gave birth to her First-Born, but the signs of her virginity remained."<sup>12</sup> To those who deny Mary's virginity after giving birth to the Redeemer, this is how he replied: "How would it have been possible for her who was the home of the indwelling of the Spirit, whom the divine power overshadowed, that she be joined to a mortal being, and give birth filled with birthpangs, in the image of the primeval curse?"<sup>13</sup> In short, Ephrem's conviction is that Mary conceived her Son in virginity and that she remained a virgin for the rest of her life.

St. Ephrem considers the virginal womb of Mary, along with the sealed grave of Christ as pointers to Christ's heavenly origin; this he explains in his *Hymns on the Nativity*:

Sealed was the grave which they entrusted  
with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb  
that no man knew. The virginal womb  
and the sealed grave like trumpets  
for a deaf people, shouted in its ear.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. I. Ortiz De Urbina, "La mariologia nei padri siriaci", in *OCP* I (1935), 102.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aphrahat, *Demonstration* IX, *PS* I, 418.

<sup>11</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, II § 2, ET by C. McCarthy, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, II § 8, ET by C. McCarthy, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, II § 6, ET by C. McCarthy, 63.



The sealed womb, the secured stone:  
among the slanderers the conception is slandered,  
that it was human seed, and the resurrection,  
that it was human robbery. Seal and signet  
refute and convince that He was a heavenly one.<sup>14</sup>

We quote below another text from St.Ephrem's Nativity Hymn:

From the thirsty earth gushes forth a Spring  
sufficiently to satisfy the thirst of the peoples.  
From a virgin womb as if from a rock,  
sprouted the Seed from which harvests have come.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from these citations that St.Ephrem is the forerunner of Mar Jacob in applying symbolic expressions to Mary. Before entering into Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's virginity, it is necessary to analyse etymologically the word "virgin" in Syriac, to look at a few of the imageries he uses and to see his approach to this mystery.

## 2. Etymological Analysis of the Word "Virgin"

An etymological analysis of the Syriac words that Mar Jacob used is relevant to understanding how he dealt with Mary's virginity. The Syriac words repeatedly used by Mar Jacob<sup>16</sup> in reference to her conception are *lo zaugo* ܠܐ ܙܘܓܐ and *lo šawthofūtho* ܠܐ ܫܘܬܫܘܬܐ ܬܗܘܐ ܐܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܙܘܓܐ which mean that she conceived without sexual union. The words *zaugo* ܙܘܓܐ and *šawthofūtho* ܫܘܬܫܘܬܐ refer to marital union. With the addition of the negative expression *lo* ܠܐ, Mar Jacob says that Mary was not united in marriage and this is a reference to her conception without sexual union.

Another important word he uses to refer to Mary's virginity is *b<sup>e</sup>thūlo* ܒܬܘܠܐ. *B<sup>e</sup>thūlo* is the Syriac word which in English means *an unmarried man, celibate, chaste and virgin*.<sup>17</sup> *B<sup>e</sup>thūltho* ܒܬܘܠܬܐ is the word which Mar Jacob used to name Mary as a virgin. It is together with this word that Mar Jacob referred to Christ's

<sup>14</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 10:8-9, ET by K. Mcvey, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 4:84-85, ET by K. Mcvey, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 616; 618; 626; 642; 652; 657; 666; 674.

<sup>17</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 56.



humanity, as in the appellation “Son of the Virgin” (*bro d’b<sup>e</sup>thūltho* ܒܪܐ ܕܒܬܘܠܬܗ).<sup>18</sup> Concerning his corporeal birth from Mary, he said that just as the Father who begot Him without a beginning, the “Virgin Mother” (*ēmo b<sup>e</sup>thūltho* ܐܡܐ ܒܬܘܠܬܗ) bore Him without an explanation.<sup>19</sup> The plural word *b<sup>e</sup>thūle* ܒܬܘܠܬܐ means *tokens of virginity* and *the virgin state*. Mar Jacob called Mary “a virgin” (*b<sup>e</sup>thūl*), her Son “the Son of the virgin” (*bro d’b<sup>e</sup>thūltho*) and this refers to the virginal conception of Mary. The analysis of the word “virgin” is important to show that Mar Jacob understood Isaiah’s prophecy (Is 7:14) as the “virgin conceiving a son” and not in the sense of “a young woman conceiving a child.” Mar Jacob’s application of the word “virgin” (*b<sup>e</sup>thūl*) thus emphasizes his conviction that it was not any young woman, but “a virgin” who gave birth to the Son of God.

### 3. The Imagery of Virginity

Mar Jacob deals with Mary’s virginal conception through different imageries. He divides this imagery into two: from nature and from the Scriptures.<sup>20</sup> There is a certain ambiguity in the division of the imagery which he calls “taken from nature.” This division is not clear enough, for what he calls as imagery “taken from nature”, are also biblical. However, although taken from the Bible, they are related to nature. In short, the basis of the division is not clear.

There are ten such imagery; the first one is about Adam who was formed from the earth and in God’s grace (Gen 2:7).<sup>21</sup> The second imagery is a comparison of Eve’s birth from the side of Adam (Gen 2:20-23) with our Lord’s birth from Mary. Mar Jacob saw Eve as the rib which came out from Adam’s side without

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<sup>18</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 70.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xviii-xix.

causing any corruption to his body, and that she would be the type of Him who shone forth in Mary's virginity.<sup>22</sup>

As our father generated our mother without marital union,  
she also generated because she was as Adam before he sinned.  
The Holy Spirit, which had blown on Adam's face  
and generated Eve, she also received and gave birth to a Son.  
That purity which was in Adam, Mary also acquired,  
by the Spirit who came and she gave birth without impulse of  
lust.

Without marital union, Adam had generated the mother of life;  
he prefigured the birth of the One who indeed is the fountain  
of life, our Lord.<sup>23</sup>

The third imagery is the miraculous and sudden appearance of the ram which Abraham saw "caught in a thicket by his horns" (Gen 22:13). Mar Jacob cites this incident in his two nativity homilies.

The tree which provided the ram on the mountain of Isaac  
is the young girl who conceived the fruit in her womb without  
marital union.<sup>24</sup>

Who was united (in marriage) with the tree when it gave birth  
to the lamb  
or who knew the rock when it gave birth to rivers?<sup>25</sup>

The fourth imagery is the miraculous burst of water which occurred when Moses struck the rock at the command of God: "you shall strike the rock with the rod, and water shall come out of it" (Ex 17:5-7).

The rock that gave birth to rivers for the great people  
is Christ who supplied life to the dead world.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xix.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 116.

The fifth imagery is the staff of Aaron which “had sprouted and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds” (Num 17:8; Heb 9:4).

By what spirit did the staff sprout forth in an unusual manner?  
or by what marital union did a lifeless jawbone bring out  
water?<sup>27</sup>

The sixth imagery is taken from Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in which he saw a stone which was not cut out by human hands (Dan 2:34).

We have seen that stone which was hewn without the hands,  
which is Christ who came to the birth without marital union.<sup>28</sup>

The seventh imagery is the analogy with the rays of the sun; this has no explicit reference in the Scripture. The rays of the sun neither destroy nor endanger the transparent body but make it more visible. Mar Jacob said that the rays of the sun depicted the miraculous birth of Jesus without causing any change or corruption to the virginity of Mary.

The guarded seal of your youthfulness would not be  
destroyed.

The serene Radiance will thrust itself in, will enter and recline  
in your womb.<sup>29</sup>

If any object other than the rays of the sun had passed through, it would have destroyed the transparent body. So, Mar Jacob’s conclusion is that since Mary’s virginity was not dissolved in parturition, it was God who came out of her, because a man could not pass through the womb without disturbing the seal of virginity.

The eighth imagery is that “without marital union did a lifeless jawbone bring out water” (Judg 15:15-19).<sup>30</sup> Judges 15:15-19 is the

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<sup>27</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 115.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 55.



biblical reference for this imagery. Although this text speaks about the jawbone of an ass with which Samson killed a thousand men, the text does not say that the jawbone brought forth water. The text says that when Samson was thirsty, he prayed to God and “God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and there came forth water from it” (Judg 15:19). So, it may refer either to the Jawbone, or to the hill named after the jawbone (Judg 15:19). The text says that water burst forth from a place called *Ra'math-le'hi*, which means “hill of jawbone.” Therefore, “jawbone” is a hill named after the jawbone. If this is the case, Mar Jacob means that water came forth from a hill. But if we take literally what he said: “without marital union did a lifeless jawbone bring out water”, it would mean that water came forth from the jawbone of an ass with which Samson killed many people. The former interpretation is more sensible when compared to the biblical text. However, Mar Jacob's text can be interpreted in either way, though the present thesis favours the first.

The ninth imagery is a contrast between the births of Jesus, “the Word” (Jn 1:1, 14) and that of John the Baptist, “the Voice” (Mt 3:3),<sup>31</sup> which helps one to understand Mary's virginal conception. This cannot be called imagery in the strict sense, but we put it in the category of imageries because our poet-theologian illustrated the births of John the Baptist which was out of marital union and of Christ which was without marital union. Concerning the existence of the “voice”, Mar Jacob said that it was the union of different elements:

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<sup>30</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 71.

<sup>31</sup> The basis of this parallelism is to show that Jesus was greater. Concerning this R. E. Brown and others have written; “In the instance of the Baptist the age and barrenness of the parents were overcome by divine intervention; one would expect a greater intervention in the instance of Jesus, and that expectation is not fulfilled if he was conceived without divine help. It is admirably fulfilled if there is a virginal conception.” R. E. Brown, et al., *Mary in the New Testament*, New York, 1978, 121.

Indeed, the *voice* is impelled to go out *by union*  
 with the *mouth*, and the *teeth*, and with the *tongue* which sends  
 it forth.  
 [...]

These corporeal instruments which were alien when they were  
 united,  
 have generated the voice that by it the word might be  
 transmitted to its place.<sup>32</sup>

But the “word” does not need the union of anything for its existence because, “without coupling it is perfect and still, where it is.”<sup>33</sup> John, *the voice* is a man and “in marital union his mother conceived him in the embrace of his father.”<sup>34</sup> But the nature of the *Word* is different. For, “Without marital union the *Word* dwells *within the mind*,”<sup>35</sup> “it is concealed *in the soul* and *does not draw near to partnership*” and “It is hidden *in the mind* and *without coupling dwells in the soul*.”<sup>36</sup> The nature of the word is such that it does not require the union of corporeal elements, and therefore,

The Virgin was chosen for the Word by the divine Majesty,  
 for the Word has no need at all of coupling.  
 A pure maiden, who was not joined in marriage,  
 was chosen for the Word, because her conceiving and her  
 giving birth were remote from marital union.<sup>37</sup>

The conclusion is that just as there is no voice, without the coupling of mouth, teeth and tongue, “no one comes to birth without marital union.”<sup>38</sup> In the act of our hearing, the function of the *voice* is important, for it enables the hearer to receive the word. The task of the voice is to present the *word* and then it has no other role, “when the Voice reached the door of the ear, he remained behind, that One entered.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 84. [My italics].

<sup>33</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 85.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 84.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 85.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 86.

The tenth imagery is a typological way of expressing Mary's virginal conception which Mar Jacob called "conception through Mary's ear." The use of this typology shows Ephrem's influence upon him, because it was St. Ephrem who first applied this typology to Mary in the Syriac tradition.<sup>40</sup> This refers to the fact that Mary conceived Christ not through sexual union, but by the Holy Spirit. So it was not through the door of womb, but through the "ear", the door of the heart that she conceived. Mary's inner listening is attested to by the evangelist Luke when he wrote: "But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). Mary conceived her child in being obedient to the Word of God that was announced by the angel.

The typological significance is that instead of Eve who listened to the cajolery of the serpent and adhered to Satan, Mary, by prudently listening to the angel and consenting to become the mother of the Son of God, conceived Jesus. In place of "Eve who inclines her ear" and listens to the voice of the deceiver, the Watcher was "*instilling salvation* into Mary's ear."<sup>41</sup> Mar Jacob interpreted this as removing the insinuation of the serpent from her and consoling her. This is how he applied this typology:

Her words went out like guards from the royal court  
so that the Royal Son might enter along with them by the door  
of the ear.  
And while the house was made radiant by these things in a  
holy manner,

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<sup>40</sup> In Syriac tradition, St. Ephrem made good use of this typology prior to Mar Jacob. I strongly disagree with L. Sako, who says that "It is curious that Ephrem is *the only church father* to say that Mary got pregnant through ear" (Cf. L. Sako "Ephrem's Teaching: A Source for Updating Catechism", *The Harp* 1:2. (1988), 67), because besides Ephrem and Mar Jacob, other Syrian writers also made use of this imagery. For example Isaac of Antioch asks "If He was not God, how did he enter by the ear?" Isaac Of Antioch, *Homiliae Sancti Isaac Syri Antiocheni*, ed., P. Bedjan, I. Paris, 1903, 715-716.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 30.



the Son of the King entered and dwelt in the shrine of  
virginity.<sup>42</sup>

The prayers that Mary said and the praises that she offered are pictured as the royal guards who went out to receive the King, the Son of God. Mary's ears are the doors by which He entered.

In utilizing the typology of *conception through the ear*, Mar Jacob emphasizes that Mary's response to the angel's invitation was an exercise of her free will. He thinks that Eve's disobedience was due to her silence before the serpent, and "If she [Eve] had asked she would have vanquished him;" [the messenger].<sup>43</sup> Eve's temptation was that she wanted to become "a goddess", and the trial which Mary's messenger brought was "a conception without marital union."<sup>44</sup> Eve without asking any clarification acceded to the messenger and because of her silence she owned "guilt and the fouling of a name",<sup>45</sup> but Mary before taking her decision, demanded an explanation from the messenger. Having heard from the angel that "The Holy Spirit and the power of the Exalted One will come to you",<sup>46</sup> Mary said: "[...] Let it happen to me, according to your word sir."<sup>47</sup> According to Mar Jacob, Mary's consent made at the time of the Annunciation was the basis of her *virginity in partu*. Her exercise of free will was honoured by God in leaving her virginity intact in her birth-giving:

Let it happen to me, according to your word sir, Mary said.  
She gave her consent and henceforth she received the fruit in her  
womb.

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 60. [My italics].

<sup>43</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 52. [My square brackets].

<sup>44</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 52.

<sup>45</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 60.

She by her free will opened the door and then the King entered,  
so that through free will the perfect seal might be honoured.<sup>48</sup>

The events narrated in Genesis 22:13, Exodus 17:5-7 and Judges 15:15-19 took place in an improvised manner, when the recipients of God's gifts might not have even expected them. In citing these imageries in the context of Mary's virginal conception, Mar Jacob teaches the audience about God who made the recipients joyous with His gifts and that God had come to dwell among human beings to make humanity and the whole universe happy.

#### 4. Mary's Betrothal to Joseph

Both Mathew and Luke refer to Mary's conception as resulting from the power of the Holy Spirit. Though Mary conceived virginally, she was betrothed to Joseph. Mar Jacob tries to see why this betrothal was necessary.

##### 4.1. Christ's Descendence from David

The first reason for Joseph's espousal to Mary is to affirm that Christ is a descendant of David, whereby He becomes the "King, born from the royal tribe of Judah." In the following lines Mar Jacob says that kings are born in the tribe of Judah and the priests in the tribe of Levi:

The tribe of Levi consisted of priests and not of kings;  
that of Judah put forth kings, behold, out of David.  
The tribe of kings was distant from the Levites;  
but why did the Watcher call the sterile one Mary's next of  
kin?<sup>49</sup>

In the oracle regarding the birth of the Immanuel, who is "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace", Isaiah adds that this child will sit upon the throne of

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<sup>48</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 60. [My italics].

<sup>49</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 46.

David and his kingdom will have no end (Is 9:6-7).<sup>50</sup> Mar Jacob convincingly argues in favour of the Davidic descentence of Christ and clarifies that the angel's words to Mary: "your kinswoman Elizabeth" in no way means that Mary and Elizabeth were of the same family. This is how he presents it:

How could the wife of the high priest be a kinswoman of  
Mary,  
 being herself a Levite, and Mary is of the house of David?<sup>51</sup>

The angel informed Mary that her Son was to sit at the throne of His father David and he would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Lk 1:33; Ps 89: 3-4; 2 Sam 7:12-16). Since Jesus is not the corporeal son of Joseph, if Mary was not from the house of David the scriptural passage "the Lord will give to him the throne of his father David" (Lk 1:32) could not have become true. Because of these reasons Mar Jacob concludes that Mary is a daughter of David that is from the tribe of Judah:

Mary is truly the daughter of David,  
 for the Son of David is the fruit of her flesh.<sup>52</sup>

Concerning the Davidic descentence of Christ, the Syriac tradition holds that *Mary belonged* to the tribe of Judah and that the Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be born as the "Son of David" was fulfilled in Mary's conception. St. Paul also mentions that Christ descended from the tribe of David (2 Tim 2:8). Since Christ is conceived without male co-operation, it is through Mary, the betrothed of Joseph that Jesus becomes the descendent of David. St. Ephrem in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, presented his arguments in favour of Christ's descentence from

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<sup>50</sup> Commenting upon the nativity of Christ St. Ephrem in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, affirms the Davidic lineage of our Lord. He alludes to the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 11:1) and that of Zachariah (Lk 1:69) to conclude the Davidic line of Christ. Cf. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 1 § 26, ET by C. McCarthy, 55.

<sup>51</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 48.



David.<sup>53</sup> It is suitable that Joseph be elected as the husband of Mary so that Christ would be born from the family of David. This shows that according to Mar Jacob, Mary did not belong to the tribe of Levi,<sup>54</sup> but to the tribe of Judah.<sup>55</sup> The consequence is that if Mary was from the tribe of Levi, Christ would have been a levite priest by birth and Mary's virginal conception would have been out of place.

St. Ephrem, in his *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, wrote about the purpose of the angel's appearance to Joseph (Mt 1:20): "It

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<sup>53</sup> For example, St. Ephrem cites Is 11:1 ("There will come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse, and a scion will blossom from his root") and Lk 1:69 ("in the house of David his son") to show the Davidic lineage of Jesus. And from the texts of Paul in 2 Tim 2:8, Rom 1:2-3 and Heb 7:14 Ephrem concludes "that Mary was not from the house of Levi but from the house of Judah." As a further clarification of the problem of kinship between Mary and Elizabeth, Ephrem speaks of the mixing up of the tribes of Judah and Levi. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 1 § 26, ET by C. McCarthy, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Jacob also wrote about the handing down of the Old Testament priesthood which Christ received and gave to the apostles and to the church:

This is the reason that called Him to come for baptism;  
so that the dominion of the priests should be concluded in Him and it  
should proceed from Him.

The Father gave the deposit to Moses on the mountain  
and sent His Son who received it from John in the water.

[...]

That priesthood which had been handed down from the house  
of Aaron  
proceeded from our Redeemer through the apostles to the  
world.

Jacob of Serugh, *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*, HS I, 167-193; ET T. by Kollamparampil, *Select Festal Homilies*, Rome, 1997, 185.

<sup>55</sup> Modern interpretation on this topic does not agree with Mar Jacob's position. For it holds the Aaronic descent of Mary. The commentary on the birth of Jesus goes like this: "Joseph belonged to the house of David and so the legal Davidic descent of Jesus is assured. It cannot be shown that Mary was of the family of David, though it is reasonable to think so, she was certainly related to Elizabeth who was of Aaronic descent." W. J. Harrington, "St. Luke", in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London, 1969, 995.

was a wonderful thing that [the angel] also called him, *Son of David*, to remind him of David, the head of his ancestors, to whom God had made a promise that from his descendants according to the flesh he would raise up the Messiah.”<sup>56</sup> The New Testament apocryphal also attests that Mary belonged to the family of David.<sup>57</sup>

## 4.2. The Inscription of Christ's Name among the Kings

The second reason for Mary's betrothal to Joseph is to inscribe Christ's name in the name of His father, because “in the succession of Kings, no woman is inscribed.”<sup>58</sup> We have seen above that Christ did not belong to the priestly family, but to the royal family of Judah. Therefore it was necessary that Mary, from whom Christ was to be born, be espoused to Joseph and take his name as husband. Mar Jacob says that Christ's kingship is realized at the nativity:

He called him ‘son of David’ indicating to him that he might  
understand  
that from the house of David there would shine forth the King  
of whom Jacob had written.<sup>59</sup>

It was necessary that Joseph be the spouse of Mary, neither for marital union nor for procreation, but to co-operate with Mary in the

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<sup>56</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, II § 3, ET by C. McCarthy, 61.

<sup>57</sup> The apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James*, brings out very positively Mary's lineage from the family of David. When the council of priests wanted to entrust to the virgins of the family of David the work of spinning a veil for the temple of the Lord, Mary was brought and the priest recognized her as a child of the family of David, and undefiled before God. Cf. *Protoevangelium of James*, 10. ET in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, 363.

<sup>58</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 63; In the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, St. Ephrem also says that it is the generation of men that numbers and counts in the genealogy, and that is the reason why the Scripture is silent about the genealogy of Mary. In this way St. Ephrem shows that Christ was born into the family of David which continued till Joseph, the espoused of Mary. Cf. Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 1 § 25, ET by C. McCarthy, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 74.

Incarnation. Mar Jacob presents the motive of Joseph's role this way:

Joseph was appointed as a veil between her and her Son,  
until the Son of God willed to reveal Himself.<sup>60</sup>

Thus Mar Jacob extols Joseph's role at the nativity even though he is not Christ's father.

#### 4.3. Mary's Protection, Safety and Good Name

Joseph becomes "the reputed father of our Lord, at the time of his coming",<sup>61</sup> in order to protect Mary. Otherwise she would have been condemned as a harlot and punished according to Moses' law that "they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has wrought folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house" (Deut 22:21). Therefore, although Joseph is not Christ's father, he is spoken of as the "husband of your mother"<sup>62</sup> so that in saying that the "Child was his", Joseph might shelter her and avoid counting her as an adulteress.<sup>63</sup>

Lest she be troubled in making a defence to the Hebrew  
women,  
at that time the Virgin called Joseph, the just one, her  
husband.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore the purpose of bringing Joseph to the scene of the Incarnation was for Mary's protection, safety and good name. Mar Jacob explains this in the homily *On the Annunciation*:

As soon as it was known that there was a babe in her womb,  
the Watcher commanded him and he brought her into his  
house lest she suffer dishonour.

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<sup>60</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 63.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 61.

<sup>62</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 63.



[...]

Because Joseph the just one would minister to the way of the  
Son,  
it was necessary that he be a husband to his Mother in her  
virginity.<sup>65</sup>

So it was to protect Mary and her Child, that Joseph became the husband of Mary.

## 5. Mar Jacob's Understanding of Mary's Virginity

The prominent aspects in Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's virginity are: 1) Mary's perpetual virginity 2) Mary's - virginity is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, 3) Mary's virginity – a sign that her child is the Son of God, 4) Mary's holiness and 5) Spiritual aspects of Mary's virginity.

### 5.1. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The first prominent feature of Mary's virginity in Mar Jacob is that she was perpetually a virgin. Virginity as a permanent state of life is quite unknown in the Old Testament, although premarital virginity was expected in women. But the New Testament extols virginity, for Christ praised the celibates when he said: "[...] and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12). The state of Mary's virginity is remarkable, because it is connected with the Incarnation of Christ. We quote a very striking text from Mar Jacob's homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

She received completely beauty, blessings and sanctity,  
and virginity which not even in His nativity did the Wonderful  
one dissolve.  
The Light dwelt in her, who remained in pure splendour,  
so that she should become a virgin for ever and uninvestigable  
mother.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 61-64.

Mar Jacob believed that Joseph and Mary remained chaste after the birth of Christ; this he expressed through Joseph's mouth:

Because then I thought of you as a married woman in adultery;  
me, God forbid, that I should turn to marital union that is far  
off from you.

Come, enter and be the mistress of the habitation of your  
virginity

and while I rejoice I will minister to your holiness.

Behold, from today *I have dismissed from my mind (the idea  
of) marital union,*

and to your purity I am submitting myself because your Son is  
my Lord.<sup>67</sup>

Since marital union is an inevitable purpose of marriage, in order for Mary to remain perpetually a virgin, Joseph's co-operation was necessary.<sup>68</sup> Mar Jacob held the view that Joseph and Mary co-operated with the divine plan announced through Gabriel, and thus she remained chaste. In the homily *Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years*, Mar Jacob illustrated the co-operation of the couple as follows:

Blessed is Mary, inasmuch as she kept the mystery secret  
And revealed not that she was a virgin after she bore Him,  
Lest the Hebrew women, the daughters of vipers, deride her  
And call her a liar when she spoke the truth.

Blessed also is Joseph, the just, because he consented  
To keep the secret and to act as though he were the father.

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<sup>66</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, viii. [My italics].

<sup>67</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 75. [My italics].

<sup>68</sup> In the *Hymns on the Nativity*, St. Ephrem, depicts Mary's decision to remain in a virginal state as her own self-determination.

Mary who conceived Him hated sexual union;  
the soul in which He dwells will not commit adultery.  
When Mary perceived Him, she forsook her bridegroom;  
behold, He dwells in chaste women if they have perceived  
Him.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 4:131-132, ET by K. Mcvey, 99.

Thus, Mar Jacob states that with Joseph's co-operation Mary remained a virgin after giving birth to Christ.

## 5.2. Mary's Virginity: the Fulfilment of the Old Testament Prophecy

The second aspect that Mar Jacob emphasized was that this virginal conception was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Immanuel: “Behold, a young woman<sup>70</sup> shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el” (Is 7:14). Mar Jacob considered the fulfilment of this prophecy when the virgin gave birth to her Son.

The *virgin gave birth* and fulfilled everything that had been written,

<sup>69</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 43-44.

<sup>70</sup> The English translation of Is 7:14, differs from the Syriac version. While the Syriac word used is *b<sup>e</sup>thūltha* which means virgin, the Revised Standard Version uses the expression “young woman.” Cf. Is 7:14 in *Kthōbo Qādīšo: Kthōbo D’diathiqo Âthiqōtho Whdtho*, Syria, 1996.



and anyone who again wants to prophesy sets division.

[...]

The Father had a single (Son) and He sent Him *as He promised,*  
and behold, Immanuel is with us and He is the Only-Begotten.<sup>71</sup>

On another occasion he placed the prophecy of Isaiah in the mouth of Mary in the form of a question to Joseph:

Indeed, have you not heard from Isaiah when he proclaimed,  
'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and give birth to Immanuel'?<sup>72</sup>

In all these descriptions, Mar Jacob illustrated that Mary conceived her Son virginally and this was a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. Mar Jacob taught his audience that the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy marked the completion of the story of prophecy itself. He presented Christ's birth as the culmination of revelation, thus inviting them to believe in Him.

The Bridegroom himself entered and received the bride, the  
daughter of lights;  
and prophecy will not resound again concerning the good  
tidings.

*Behold, a virgin conceives and gives birth,* said Isaiah  
and because she has given birth, the story of prophecy is  
completed.<sup>73</sup>

Mar Jacob's conviction was that in Mary's conception the prophecy is fulfilled and this is the basis for each one to believe in Him.

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<sup>71</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 119. [My italics].

<sup>72</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 71.

<sup>73</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 119.

### 5.3. Mary's Perpetual Virginity: A Sign that Her Child is the Son of God

The third prominent aspect concerning Mary's virginity is that she gave birth to the Son of God. Her perpetual virginity is a sign that her Son is the Son of God. In other words, this miraculous conception occurs only since it was the divine child that she bore in her womb, concerning which Mar Jacob illustrates in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*:

If it had been a man, who is not God to whom Mary gave  
birth,  
the virginal signs would have been dissolved since man cannot  
protect the virginal signs.  
These are two things and one is linked to the other,  
and he who doubts this one will not be obliged to believe this  
(other).  
When he does not also admit that Mary gave birth to God,  
how does he admit that her virginity was not dissolved?  
If then, he believes that she gave birth to Lord, the Only  
Begotten,  
he will not be in doubt that the seal of her virginity is  
preserved.<sup>74</sup>

I have pointed out that Mary's virginity and Christ's eternal priesthood were interconnected. So here also, Mar Jacob saw the connection between Christ's divinity and Mary's perpetual virginity. I will deal with this theme when we study the symbols of Mary's virginity.

### 5.4. Mary's Holiness

Mar Jacob presented Mary as the holiest person in humanity. Mary's holiness is exemplary in comparison with the rest of humanity. Mar Jacob said that:

If there had been a spot in her soul or a defect,

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<sup>74</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xi.

He would have sought for himself another mother in whom  
there is no blemish.<sup>75</sup>

Many modern scholars try to see, in the writings of the early Church Fathers, the concept of the Immaculate Conception. This attempt seems to be quite arbitrary. For instance, when Mar Jacob spoke about the holiness of Mary, he did not use the same concept as in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Mar Jacob's understanding of her holiness can be delineated as 1) her holiness is in comparison with the rest of humanity, 2) this is in connection with her divine motherhood 3) the basis of her holiness is her cooperation to God's grace.

Let us see the difference between the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception and Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's holiness. Here is the declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception:

We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.<sup>76</sup>

The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception differs from Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's holiness in two aspects. The first is that he did not speak about Mary as being preserved immune from *all stain of original sin*. Instead, he presented her as the most pleasing one before God: "how exalted and pure from evil, nor stirs in her an impulse inclined to lust."<sup>77</sup> Mar Jacob further describes how Mary had prepared herself so as to be the most pleasing one before God:

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<sup>75</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Denz., 1641, ET in *Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed., M. L. Trouvé, Boston, 2000, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.



And she allows no thought for luxury,  
 nor worldly conversation which causes cruel harm.  
 Desire for worldly vanity does not burn in her,  
 nor is she occupied with childish things.<sup>78</sup>

The second difference is that her holiness is presented as a result of the exercise of Mary's free will. Mar Jacob presented Mary as the one who pleased God with her life. We quote three passages which point to the perfection that she achieved as a result of her free will.

This is beauty, when one is beautiful of one's own accord;  
 glorious graces of perfection are in her will.  
 However great be the beauty of something from God,  
 it is not acclaimed if freedom is not present.<sup>79</sup>  
 She was most fair both in her nature and in her will,  
 because she was not sullied with displeasing desires.  
 From her childhood, she stood firm in unblemished  
 uprightness;  
 she walked in the way without offenses.  
 Her original nature was preserved with a will for good things  
 because there were always tokens of virginity in her body and  
 holy things in her soul.<sup>80</sup>

He chose for himself a virgin who was betrothed and  
 preserved;  
 she was *holy, modest, and vigilant*.  
 He descended and dwelt in the *blessed one, most fair*;  
*her womb was sealed, her body was holy, and her soul was*  
*limpid*.<sup>81</sup>

We may sum up the difference between the Dogma and Mar Jacob's understanding in the following way: the dogma emphasizes Mary's immunity from the stains of sin from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb, while Mar Jacob presents Mary

<sup>78</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 25.

<sup>80</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 44.[My italics].

as the most faithful daughter of God who pleased God by her obedience to the Law. For he writes:

She did not turn aside from the justice which is in the Law,  
and neither carnal nor bodily desire disturbed her.<sup>82</sup>

Mar Jacob spoke about the personal integrity of Mary in that she as a wife, mother and virgin, was holy. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, according to Mar Jacob, was "to let loose from her the former sentence of Eve and Adam."<sup>83</sup> Mary's purification was necessary for the Son of God to assume a body without sin. Mar Jacob's exegesis of Luke 1:35 makes a distinction between the "Spirit" and the "Power of God." The Holy Spirit had "sanctified" her and "purified" her in order that "He might take from her a pure body without sin."<sup>84</sup> Let us listen to Mar Jacob's own words:

He sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among  
women;

He *freed her from that curse of sufferings on account of Eve,*  
her mother.

[...]

The *Spirit freed her from that debt* that she might be beyond  
transgression when He solemnly dwelt in her.

He *purified the Mother* by the Holy Spirit while dwelling in  
her,

that He might take from her a pure body without sin.

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<sup>82</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 35. In the sense of purification Mar Jacob uses different Syriac words: *mrāq*, *zalal*, and *d'kya*. The word *mrāq* gives the meaning of purifying, polishing and cleansing. Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 303. In the Pael form, *zālel* means to draw from the lees, to fine, free from the dross etc. Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 478. *D'kya* in pael form means to cleanse, purify, pronounce clean according to the ceremonial law. The Syriac word used for sanctification is *qādeš*. In Pael form *qādeš* means to keep or render holy, to hallow, sanctify, consecrate, to set apart for holy use, to celebrate holy rites, to give in marriage; to chant the *Tersanctus* cry 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 491.

Lest the body with which He clothed Himself according to  
nature be sullied,  
He purified the Virgin by the Holy Spirit and then dwelt in  
her.

The Son of God wanted to be related to her,  
and first *He made her body without sin*.

The Word had descended that He might become flesh; on this  
account,  
*by the Spirit He purified the one from whom He had become  
flesh,*  
so that He might become like us in everything when He  
descended, except for this: that his pure body is without sin.<sup>85</sup>

The above passage is Mar Jacob's explanation of "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; [...]" (Lk 1:35). Mary had achieved in her life all the perfection, and holiness that one can achieve through one's effort, of which he says: "She rose up to this measure on her own, until the Spirit, that perfecter of all came to her."<sup>86</sup> He believed that Mary had achieved perfection before the angel came to her. The following lines make this clearer:

He [God] *searched* her and *found* humility and holiness in her,  
and limpid impulses and a soul desirous of divinity.  
*And a pure heart and every reckoning of perfection,*  
because of this He chose her, the pure and most fair one.<sup>87</sup>

Mar Jacob, through this passage illustrates that Mary was holy even before the angel brought God's message to her.<sup>88</sup> Mary is an ordinary human being, whom the Father deemed worthy, on account

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<sup>85</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 34-35. [My italics].

<sup>86</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 38.

<sup>87</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23. [My italics].

<sup>88</sup> In an article which discusses the original sin of the Mother of God in the writings of Jacob of Serugh, P. Krüger writes: Es war nicht so, daß Maria zur Mutter des Herrn bestimmt war und sie deshalb durch die Gnade geheiligt wurde, sondern umgekehrt, sie stieg erst zur Stufe der Heiligkeit empor und wurde als dann auserwählt, die Mutter des Sohnes Gottes zu werden." P. Krüger, "Die Frage der Erbsündigkeit der Gottesmutter im Schrifttume des Jakob von Serugh", in *OS* 1 (1952), 201.



of what she was.<sup>89</sup> Hence her holiness becomes the spiritual aspect of her virginity.

### 5.5. The Spiritual Aspect of Mary's Virginity

A perusal of Mar Jacob's text shows that, according to him, Mary is the perfect believer who fulfils the spiritual norms of chastity. Christ's exhortation concerning this is: "that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). We understand from this instruction that holiness is not limited to doing some virtuous actions or refraining from committing a sin, but that one should have the orientation towards a life of sanctity. Mar Jacob presents Mary as the only one who obeys this exhortation, this becomes clear when he says that "She alone is humble, pure, limpid and without blemish."<sup>90</sup> Through a miracle Mary's virginity was preserved intact at the corporeal birth of the Son of God.

If it had been a man, who is not God, to whom Mary gave  
birth,  
the *virginal signs* would have been dissolved since man cannot  
protect the virginal signs.<sup>91</sup>

The spiritual aspect of physical virginity is supported by the recurring expression that the body of the virgin was "*full of virginal signs and milk*." This brings out succinctly his conception of Mary as a perfect virgin; and the signs of virginity bear witness to this fact.

If you had understood why Isaiah had called Him "Wonder",

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<sup>89</sup> P. Krüger in presenting Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's holiness distinguishes between two types of holiness: ethical; which she possessed from the beginning and ontological; which she received at the time of Annunciation. "Die ethische Heiligkeit, im Willen begründet, besaß Maria von Anfang an. Sie war ohne Sünde und mit vielen Tugenden geschmückt. Die ontische erhielt Maria bei der purificatio in der Verkündigung." P. Krüger, "Einige Ergänzungen zu M. Gordillo, Mariologia Orientalis", in OS 4 (1955), 158.

<sup>90</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. HANSBURY, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, xi. [My italics].

you would have admired him without investigating into the  
 Unique One.  
 The Body of the blessed one was *full of virginal signs and*  
*milk*  
 and because of this Her Son is a Wonder to the one who  
 understands it.  
 If He is a Wonder, the report of His way is better than you,  
 whereas if you have explained how He was born, then he is  
 not a Wonder.<sup>92</sup>

This expression “*full of virginal signs*” points to her perfection; not only is she physically integral, but also “pure of heart.”<sup>93</sup> Mary’s perpetual virginity is simply the outcome of her obedient and faithful life. Mar Jacob says that “she stood firm in purity of heart and in integrity of thoughts” and “From her childhood, impulses of holiness stirred within her.”<sup>94</sup> In this discussion on Mary’s physical virginity and its spiritual aspect, it is relevant to quote S. Thykootam who had studied ‘the typology of Mary’ in the Malankara liturgical tradition:

The virginity of Mary, the Mother of God, is understood by the Syrian Church, not merely as her bodily integrity, but as a total dedication of her body, mind and soul to the will of God. She placed herself at the disposal of God, her creator. She had an undivided heart and she loved God with all the strength of her faculties. She belonged to Him totally.<sup>95</sup>

In short, Mary’s virginity was not just her physical integrity but a mystery that comprised a complete dedication, trust and obedience to God. The mystery aspect is that she became the mother of the Son of God and remained a virgin. Mar Jacob also taught that God respected the free consent that Mary made at the time of the Annunciation by letting her bodily integrity remain intact at her birth-giving.

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<sup>92</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, vii. [My italics].

<sup>93</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 25.

<sup>94</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>95</sup> S. Thykootam, “The Typology of Mary in Shimo The Weekly Divine Office of the Malankara Church”, in *The Harp* 2:1 (1989), 31-44.

References can be found in early Judeo-Christian writings concerning Mary's virginity in childbirth.<sup>96</sup> In the Syriac tradition, Bar Salibi considered Mary's virginity *in parturition* as a reality, in the same way as the miracle at the resurrection of the Lord and His post-resurrectional appearance: "If thou requirest proof or illustration, hear how he came forth of the Sepulchre unopened, and entered into the Parlour being shut up, so he came forth of the womb not prejudicing virginity."<sup>97</sup> Mar Jacob repeatedly says that the Son of God in his bodily birth left the virginal seals of His mother intact.

The Begetter of babes begot himself corporeally;  
He proceeded from the womb but the seal of her virginity  
remained (intact).<sup>98</sup>

In the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* Mar Jacob wrote that Mary became the mother of the Messiah without lesion and that He was God and the Son of man, just as the girl was a virgin and a true mother.<sup>99</sup>

He showed to the world that the Heir of the house, when He  
was to enter in it,  
in front of Him the doors of virginity would not be opened.  
And he who believes both in the nature and in the Scripture,  
has learnt that the virginity of Mary was not dissolved.<sup>100</sup>

Another important aspect of Mary's physical virginity is that Mary and Joseph have refrained from sexual relations. Instead of lust and bodily desires they were led by holy desires. Two citations will make this clear:

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, 11:8-14, 175; *The Odes of Solomon*, 19:6-10, 752-753.

<sup>97</sup> Ephrem, *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus upon the Diatessaron*, ed., J. R. Harris, London, 1895, 31.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xiv.

<sup>100</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xx.



The Virgin dwelt with the just one in holy awe;  
the mystery was hidden from strangers and they did not  
perceive it.

He did not look on the blessed one as a man on his wife;  
he looked on her as the high priest looks on the Holy of  
Holies.<sup>101</sup>

The pure virgin and the just man with the same intention  
for they made holiness the marriage agreement.  
The chief of the angels was mediator and deemed them worthy  
that *they might dwell like angels without marital union*.  
In virginity and in purity and in holiness,  
they persevered in a marriage full of holy things.  
And that hidden mystery which was told by the angel;  
they were preserving it without mentioning it to strangers.<sup>102</sup>

Mar Jacob's view was that Mary was physically a virgin even after giving birth to Christ. From his understanding of Mary's virginity, it is clear that he does not consider James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), the "brethren" of Jesus as sons of Mary.<sup>103</sup> It is also clear that he was following the Ephremian tradition and used the phrases that Ephrem used. Ephrem's understanding of Mary's virginity after giving birth to Christ is seen in his commentary on the Diatessaron.

Because there are those who dare to say that Mary [cohabited] with Joseph after she bore the Redeemer, [we reply], "How would it have been possible for her who was the home of the indwelling of the Spirit, whom the divine power overshadowed, that she be joined to a mortal being, and give birth filled with birthpangs, in the image of the primeval curse?" If *Mary was blessed of women*, she would have been exempt from the curse from the beginning, and from the bearing of children in birthpangs and curses. It would be impossible therefore to call one who gave birth with these

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<sup>101</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

<sup>102</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 60.

<sup>103</sup> S. Shearer, in an article makes it clear that the 'brethren' of the Lord were neither his full brothers, nor his half brothers, but his cousins. Cf. S. Shearer, "The Brethren of the Lord", in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, eds., D. B. Orchard, et al., New York, 1957, 844-846.

birthpangs blessed. If the animals in the ark were restrained because of Noah, it was fitting that *the prophetess in whom Emmanuel dwelt should not turn to marriage*. Noah's animals [were restrained] of necessity, but she however through her own [free] will. Just as she gave birth purely, so also she remained holy.<sup>104</sup>

This text emphasises that Mary conceived her Son not out of a marital union and that she refrained from marital relations after giving birth to Christ. This reflects that the Syrian tradition as early as Ephrem's time, believed in and advocated the physical virginity of Mary. Mar Jacob in the following passage speaks about Joseph's decision to abstain from sexual union.

Joseph said: "[...]

It is a novel matter that a babe should come into being without  
marital union

and no one believes that Mary, the young girl, is a virgin.

And if I put myself far away from the Child whose Father is  
hidden,

Mary would die as an adulteress though she did not commit  
adultery.

That is why I approached, so that I may hold back from her all  
gossip

until the Child wants it and His Father would reveal His story.

[...]

But when it pleases Him to reveal himself to the world whose  
son He is

that woman will remain as mine and Mary will shine in her  
virginity.

[...]

*She was betrothed to me and now I have left behind the  
betrothal*

and I have become a servant to the mother who is totally  
holy."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, II § 6, ET by C. McCarthy, 63. [My italics].

<sup>105</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 125. [My italics].

Mar Jacob, through these lines emphasizes Joseph's co-operation with Mary. In short, Mar Jacob here illustrates the integrity of Mary's physical virginity. J. Laurenceau rightly says that the "physical virginity is to be viewed as a concrete sign both of the total joy brought by the Immanuel and of Mary's voluntary consecration to virginity."<sup>106</sup>

I have considered, in general, Mar Jacob's understanding of Mary's virginity. Now I will deal more on the symbols which he used to illustrate his understanding of Mary's virginity.

## 6. The Symbols of Mary's Virginity

According to Mar Jacob, Mary's virginity was not a "controversy" to be investigated, but a mystery to be approached with "love." He explained this by using biblical symbols and poetical language. Here we will study the biblical symbols: "the closed door", "the sealed letter", "the unploughed field that produces corn", "the unpruned vine that produces grapes", "the thirsty land that germinates a shoot" and "Gideon's fleece."

### 6.1. The Symbol of the "The Closed Door" (*thar'o dāhīd* ( ܬܗܪܝܐ ܕܐܗܝܕ ))

Mar Jacob made use of Ezekiel's vision of "the closed door" as a symbol of Mary's perpetual virginity. Through this he also illustrated that it was the Son of God to whom she gave birth and so her virginity was not dissolved in parturition.<sup>107</sup> He made frequent use of this symbol in the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*.

The virgin Mary is the *closed door* in the prophecy,

<sup>106</sup> J. Laurenceau, "Virginity, Perpetual", in *DM*, 488.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xx.



because the Lord Messiah entered the world and left it  
closed.<sup>108</sup>

The ever Mighty One entered the world through the *closed*  
*door*,  
to capture silently the tyrant who had devastated the earth.  
Your Generator saw that bodily birth of yours,  
and willed to create man in the image of your divinity.<sup>109</sup>

He interpreted the vision of Ezekiel in order to teach that Mary conceived her Son in her virginity, she remained a virgin in birth-giving and that the Son who passed through her, is God.

### 6.1.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol “Closed Door”

We find different meanings for the symbolism of the “closed door.” The reference to the “door of the tent” is significant in the understanding of the symbolism of the “closed door.” The first reference to door appears in the context of the continual burnt offering that the Israelites were to make at the door of the tent (Ex 29:42). After Nadab and Abihu who offered unholy fire before the Lord, and were devoured by the fire, Moses instructed Aaron and his children: “[...] And do not go out from the door of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses” (Lev 10:6-7). Again we see the door of the tent as a meeting point of God with man: “And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward” (Num 12:5). In short, the door of the tent reminded the people of God’s presence.

The second important passage that pertains to the “closed door” is narrated in the second Book of Samuel. The story is

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<sup>108</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, ix.

<sup>109</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xx. [My italics].

centred around David's son Amnon who loved Tamar,<sup>110</sup> who was a *virgin*. Amnon loved her very much; but "it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her" (2 Sam 13:2). In the disguise of fraternal love, he had her brought to his house and forced her to lie with him (2 Sam 13:11). Although she told him that this was a wanton act, "He would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her" (2 Sam 13:14). After committing this act, "he hated her greater than the love with which he had loved her" (2 Sam 13:15). He said to the young man who served him: "Put this woman out of my presence, and *bolt the door* after her" (2 Sam 13:17). "So his servant put her out, and *bolted the door* after her" (2 Sam 13:19).

Here the "closed door" becomes a symbol of sinfulness, abuse, rejection, and hatred. The very same door by which Tamar entered in, remains closed against her. She becomes the victim of man's lust. Among the virgin daughters of Israel, there was a custom of wearing a long robe. When the door was closed against her, "Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent the long robe which she wore; and she laid her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went" (2 Sam 13:19). The brother who had loved her and invited her to serve him, now hates her. The symbolism of the "closed door" in this story points to the absence of goodwill in humans, who shut their heart against fellow beings.

The third text concerning the "closed door" is seen in Ezekiel 44:1-3. Ezekiel had seen an outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. How do we understand the *closed gate*

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<sup>110</sup> St. Ephrem deals with Amnon's rape of Tamar in *Hymns on Virginity*. This is a meditation on the treasure of virginity and he considers a punishment to those who destroy it as inevitable. Regarding the punishment of Amnon he writes:

"[...] and Amnon, too, who lay in wait in the inner chamber and caught you,  
was dragged away into the field.  
Your destroyers were destroyed and were hunted; in them is a type  
that whoever destroys you will be destroyed."

Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity* 2:9, ET by K. Mcvey, 268.



mentioned in Ezekiel's vision? It is explained in the context of the prince's special privileges. According to the commentators on the book of Ezekiel, "The prince is the vicegerent of Yahweh who is king of the new theocratic state."<sup>111</sup> He had the privilege of participating in the sacrificial meals at the eastern gate of the outer court. There were two doors for this room, one remained closed because Yahweh had entered by it, and the other was the way of the vestibule of the gate, by which he entered and went out. "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way" (Ezek 44:2-3). Thus we consider this symbol as a type of Mary's perpetual virginity, and the commentaries on "Ezekiel" also say this: "by homiletic accommodation not a few of the Fathers see in this gate, through which God alone has passed, a figure of Our Lady's perpetual virginity."<sup>112</sup>

In the New Testament, Christ, the Son of God presents himself as the door; He says: "I am the door of the sheep" (Jn 10:7) and, "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (Jn 10:9). The most striking reference to the "closed door" occurs in the resurrection account of St. John: "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, *the doors being shut* where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). As W. Leonard, the commentator of John's Gospel says, the Lord who entered through the closed door and stood among the disciples is "Jesus, whose glorified body needed no open door to enter by."<sup>113</sup> It is true that the glorified body of the Lord is different

<sup>1</sup> E. Power & E. May, "Ezekiel", in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, London, 1969, 648.

<sup>2</sup> E. Power & E. May, "Ezekiel", in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 648.

<sup>3</sup> W. Leonard, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to St. John", in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, eds., D. B. Orchard, et al., New York, 1957, 1016.



from the body that He had taken from Mary. But it was the same person who was born of Mary and came to the disciples through the closed door. So, I think that this Scriptural passage also refers to how the Son of God was born from Mary without violating her virginity.

In the analysis of these texts how do we see their connection to virginity? 1) The door of the tent was associated with Israel's God-relationship. 2) In the story of Tamar, the door which was shut against her is the antitype of virginity. The symbol of the closed door points to the stories of all virgins who want to be pure, but are forced into sexual abuse and become the victim of man's lust. 3) The "closed door" in the Book of Ezekiel, is the explicit reference that Mar Jacob uses in his homilies as a symbol of Mary's virginity in and after giving birth. 4) The post-resurrectional appearance of Christ, although not explicitly referred to, represents Mary's virginity in parturition. It was Almighty God who is not subject to the laws of nature who was born of Mary and appeared to the disciples after His resurrection. Just as for the bodily birth of the Lord no marital union was necessary, here also in order to come to the room where the disciples were gathered, the door did not need to be opened. These biblical references enable us to understand the symbol "Closed door" employed by Mar Jacob.

### 6.1.2. Mary: The "Closed Door"

Mar Jacob interpreted Ezekiel's text of the "closed door" as a symbol of Mary's inviolable virginity in birth-giving, because she gave birth to God miraculously. Mar Jacob alludes to this when he says: "The Begetter of babes begot himself corporeally."<sup>114</sup> He added that if someone who was not God, was to pass through the womb, it was necessary that the door be opened.<sup>115</sup> According to him, the one who admits that Mary's virginity was not dissolved,

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<sup>114</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.

<sup>115</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xi. [My italics].

admits that she gave birth to the Son of God. This he brings out in the lines:

He entered the world through the *closed door*, as it is written,  
and if it had been opened, he would be neither Lord nor God.  
But since He came to birth and kept intact the token of  
virginity,  
everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord and Wonder.<sup>116</sup>

As Mary was also in indissoluble virginity,  
was preserved in parturition since she gave birth to God in  
wonder.  
If it had been a man, who is not God, to whom Mary gave  
birth,  
the virginal signs would have been dissolved, since man  
cannot protect the virginal signs.<sup>117</sup>

Mary's virginity is intrinsically connected to the Incarnation of the Son of God. He came to restore, heal and renew everything. Mar Jacob's basic principle is based on the metaphysical principle of being, that is, He who is 'perfect' by nature would not become the cause of imperfection in other beings. He, who has come to renew the corrupted nature of humanity, would not corrupt His mother in His coming to the world. The symbol "closed door" in Tamar's story becomes the antitype of Mary's virginity, for here it respects her virginity and makes it splendid. In Mar Jacob's expression, we see that instead of the long robe that Tamar rent, Mary "laced together veil of chastity":

She took up and laced together veils of chastity;  
She spread out and stretched out spacious garments of  
watchfulness.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, xv. [My italics].

<sup>117</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, xi.

<sup>118</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 60.

So what was lost in Tamar, was restored in Mary. Mar Jacob illustrated that it was the Son of God, who came forth from Mary and that makes her remain a virgin. Because the One who came to restore disordered nature would not destroy what was already perfect.

Let the prophet rejoice in the mother who remained in her  
virginity,  
and explain that (fact) to us by the door he has seen to be  
closed.

The Messiah has entered through it because the Father sent  
Him to visit the world,  
and since He is God, an opened door is not useful to Him.

*The one who sets in order everything did not come to corrupt  
nature,*

but to set in order things that are corrupt, the Father sent Him,  
He came to set in order Eve in her virginity, who has fallen,  
He did not corrupt the virgin whom He took to become His  
mother.<sup>119</sup>

In another passage, Mar Jacob explicitly speaks of Ezekiel's vision of the temple's door as a symbol of Mary's virginity; the following citation will make it clearer:

He prefigured the virgin mother in the *closed door*,  
and to Ezekiel He showed clearly that it was closed.  
And the story is true, and as that door which no one opened,  
thus remained in preservation the virginal seal of Mary.<sup>120</sup>

In the homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, Mar Jacob utilized the same symbol of the closed door of Ezekiel as a symbol of her virginity in giving birth to the Son of God.

The *closed door* of which Ezekiel has spoken  
is the virgin whose virginal seal is preserved.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Jacob of Serugh *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xv-xvi.

<sup>120</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, x. [My italics].



We have seen in Ezekiel's text that even the prince who had a special privilege in the sacrificial meal, could not enter the chamber through this door. The reason why the door remained closed was that God had entered through it and therefore no one else might pass through it. The closed door of Ezekiel's vision was interpreted by Mar Jacob as the symbol of Mary's virginity in and after giving birth. He makes good use of this symbol and says how miraculously she remained a virgin.

By the door of nativity, God entered the world, as He wanted  
and He left that door closed in virginity.

That sanctuary, whose door the prophet saw closed,  
represents to us the Virgin and the virginity which is not  
dissolved.

Sanctity is Messiah and the house of sanctity Mary,  
and the *closed door* the preserved virginal signs which stayed  
in her.<sup>122</sup>

In short, according to Mar Jacob, as it is written, Christ was to enter the world through the closed door.

He entered the world through the *closed door*, as it is written,  
and if it had been opened, He would be neither Lord, nor God.  
But since He came to birth and kept intact the token of  
virginity,  
everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord and Wonder.<sup>123</sup>

This symbol stands for the miracle that took place in Mary as she gave birth to her Son. It also highlights that parturition does not bring with it any change as regards her state of virginity. Mary's womb remained closed even after the Son of God passed through it.

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<sup>121</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 115. [My italics].

<sup>122</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, ix. [My italics].

<sup>123</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, xv.

### 6.1.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol: “Closed Door”

Mar Jacob’s employment of the symbol “closed door” in explaining the mystery of Mary’s virginity brings out three theologically important points. First, Mary is perpetually a virgin and this refers to the fact that her offspring is the Son of God, since only God could preserve her virginity uncorrupted even after giving birth to her child. The unlimited God who is beyond all limitations becomes corporeally present among humans without subjecting himself to the physiological laws of nature. Although this is outside the laws of nature Mar Jacob would not call it a contradiction; instead, in following the footprints of the prophet Isaiah, he called it a “Wonder.”

His birth is divine as well as human  
and it is not to be investigated because His *wonder* is without  
limit.<sup>124</sup>

Among the scriptural references we have seen, the symbol “closed door” in Ezekiel’s text (Ez 44:1-3) illustrates Mary’s virginity in, during and after her giving birth to Jesus.

Secondly, the Incarnation is presented here as a mystery that saves persons from their sinful conditions. In the Old Testament, the “closed door” represented man’s sinful condition, but the door which was shut against Tamar is replaced by Mary’s virginity, and thus the closed door restored her dignity as a virgin. Her virginity thus anticipated the saving effects of the Incarnation.

Thirdly, the “closed door” mentioned in the resurrection account of John emphatically brings out the understanding of “Being” which is pure substance. The perfect being is not subject to the laws of “becoming”, and hence, for the resurrected Lord to come to the parlour where the disciples were gathered, it was not necessary that the door be opened.

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<sup>124</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.

Therefore, in the symbolism of the “closed door”, Mar Jacob has succeeded in bringing out different aspects of Mary’s virginity and the Christian life. And so, Mary’s virginity is not a mere matter for academic or doctrinal interest, but a source of hope for the Christian life and its fulfilment.

## 6.2. The Symbol of the “Sealed Letter” (*egārtho htīmtho* ܐܓܪܬܗ ܗܬܝܡܬܗ)

The *sealed letter* is another symbol which illustrates the virginity of Mary. Mar Jacob said that she was the letter in which the secret of the Father was written.<sup>125</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, Mar Jacob was a teacher of the Scriptures, and therefore an analysis of the biblical background of the symbol “sealed letter” prepares one to better understand its symbolism in reference to Mary’s virginity. As in the case of the “closed door”, in the Bible, the “sealed letter” is both an antitype and symbol of the same thing. As an antitype, this points to the corrupted aspect which was restored or transformed in the Christ event.

### 6.2.1. The Biblical Context of the “Sealed Letter”

In the Old Testament the sealing of a letter was the sign of secrecy and royalty, as we read in the Book of Esther, “it [letter] was written in the name of King Ahasu-erus and sealed with the king’s ring” (Esth 3:12).<sup>126</sup> We also read that “an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s ring cannot be revoked” (Esth 8:8).

The first reference to the symbol “letter” can be seen in the life of King David. King David, after having lain with Bethsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, wrote to Joab to “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down and die” (2 Sam 11:15). The reason for doing this was that Bethsheba had conceived a child and David wanted to

<sup>125</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>126</sup> [My square brackets].



marry her after Uriah's death. Here the "letter" is a symbol of sinfulness. In short, the "letter" carried the commandment to kill a faithful servant in order to hide the king's adultery.

The second reference to the symbol "sealed letter" concerns Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab <sup>127</sup> who wrote "*sealed letters*" in the King's name (1 Kings 21:8). The content of the letter was a plot to murder Naboth, an innocent man in order to acquire his possession. Naboth was reluctant to sell the vineyard that he had inherited from his fathers. The only possible way to procure his vineyard was to kill him. The cunning Jezebel wrote letters to the nobles and elders to "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people [...], saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him to death" (1 Kings 21:10). The elders acted according to Jezebel's letter and "the base fellows brought a charge against him in the presence of the people saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death, with stones." (1 Kings 21:13). In Naboth's death we see that the "powerful ones" make use of inhuman means and ways for achieving their selfish goals. They deprive the poor of their right to possess an inheritance, accuse them of false testimony and kill them using inhuman ways. When Naboth was dead Ahab took possession of his vineyard. The "sealed letter" is a symbol of man's

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<sup>127</sup> King Ahab was least pleasing to God, for he "did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all that were before him" (1 Kings 16:30). He, under the influence of Jezebel served Baal, worshipped him and built an altar for him in Samaria. (1 Kings 16:31-32). Reflecting upon the drought and famine that came upon the land as a punishment for idolatry, Ephrem writes:

Since Jezebel refused the truth, the earth refused her ingathering.  
 A reproach bereaved the womb of the seed that the farmers lent her.  
 It choked seeds inside it since her dwellers bereaved truth,  
 and the bearer became barren, which was not in her custom,  
 and the pitcher and horn, barren, brought forth and were fruitful-which  
 is not in their nature,  
 since the voice that bereaved the earth made barren wombs fruitful.  
 But hunger overran the earth, and the reserves [of food] fell short,  
 so that full storehouses were emptied, and cellars, too, were left bare.

Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 7:3-4, ET by K. Mcvey, 293.

greed and covetousness which lead him to commit murder. This illustrates man's selfish and sinful conditions in which one cannot think of the well-being of others.

Thirdly, in the Book of Isaiah there is mention of a "sealed Book." What is interesting to us here is that no one breaks the seal of this book or reads it. The prophet writes that when it is given to the literate to read, he says: "I cannot, for it is sealed." And when it is given to the one who cannot read, he says: "I cannot read" (Is 29:11-12). Therefore, both the literate and the illiterate alike are unworthy to read and understand the prophetic vision. Although, it is not easy to interpret this text, there remains this hypothesis: is not the sealed book in Isaiah's vision, a symbol of the mystery of the Son of God who came forth from the virgin Mary?

Fourthly, in the Book of Revelations there is an account of a scroll which was written within and on the back and which was sealed with seven seals. "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals?" (Rev 5:2). We have seen above that sealing refers to secrecy. What does it mean to break the seal of a letter? J. J. Scullion, commenting on this passage says: "The breaking of the seals does not make known the written content of the book; it accomplishes God's plan of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*)."<sup>128</sup> The following verse: "the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rev 5:5) refers to the accomplishment of God's plan of salvation in Christ.

The biblical references of the "sealed letter" we have analysed shed light on two aspects: 1) man's sinful situation as in David's and Jezebel's sealed letters; 2) the divine mystery that man fails to understand as in Isaiah 29:11-12 and in Revelation 5:2-5. Just like the "closed door", the sealed letter also is an antitype of Mary's virginity. The antitype speaks of the corrupted, sinful condition and distortion of integrity, whereas in Mary's virginity we see the restoration of human integrity, holiness and perfection.

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<sup>128</sup> J.J.Scullion, "Revelation (The Apocalypse)", in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, eds. R. C. Fuller, et al., London, 1969, 1273.

### 6.2.2. Mary: the “Sealed Letter”

Why does Mar Jacob call Mary “a sealed letter”? She is called thus because Mary’s conception of Christ is compared to the writing down of a message. As Mar Jacob writes:

She gave her body as a clean sheet;  
the Word wrote his essence on it, corporeally.<sup>129</sup>

Here Mar Jacob connects the symbol “sealed letter” with the “Word” which is a synonym for Christ according to John (Jn 1:1,14), as against the “words” with which letters are written. And Mar Jacob says that “the Son is the Word and she is the letter.” So the imagery of the letter metaphorically brings out the mystery of the Incarnation. What is the message that Mary as a “*sealed letter*” contained? Mar Jacob said that in Mary, the *sealed letter* “were hidden mysteries of the Son and his depth”<sup>130</sup> and that “forgiveness was sent forth to the whole world.”<sup>131</sup> So, precisely the content of the “sealed letter” was that through this letter, the whole race of Adam received the message of good tidings; i.e., “forgiveness to all condemned for their bonds of sin.”<sup>132</sup>

There are three reasons why the present thesis considers the “*sealed letter*” as a symbol of Mary’s virginity: 1) The Divinity sealed her and then wrote on her. 2) The Father revealed sublime mysteries in her. 3) The Word entered and dwelt in her within the guarded seals. Let us quote two passages from Mar Jacob where this idea is expressed:

She was the letter, not because she was sealed after she was  
inscribed,  
but the Divinity sealed her and then wrote on her.  
They sealed her and inscribed her; she was also read although  
not being opened,

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<sup>129</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39.

<sup>130</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 38.

<sup>131</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39.

<sup>132</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39.



because the Father revealed in her, mysteries more sublime  
than usual.

The Word entered and dwelt in her within the guarded seals,  
tokens of virginity in her body but conception in her womb  
which is full of wonder.<sup>133</sup>

Mary appeared to us as a sealed letter,  
in which were hidden the mysteries of the Son and his depth.  
She gave her body as a clean sheet;  
the Word wrote his essence on it, corporeally.  
The Son is the Word and she is the letter, as we said,  
by which forgiveness was sent to the whole world.<sup>134</sup>

Isaiah 7:14 is the classical text for Mary's virginity. As we have seen above, Mar Jacob made use of this text to reproach the Jews who deny Mary's virginity in giving birth.<sup>135</sup> The argument of those who deny Mary's virginity in parturition is logical and in keeping with the natural order. They say that Christ had a true body in the womb of His mother, and this follows that in His coming to the world the seals of her virginity had to be broken. Mar Jacob's position is that the divine power can operate in a way that is different from the natural laws. He took the authority of Isaiah who prophesied about the Son of the virgin whose name is "Wonder."

The virgin conceived Him, and she was a virgin when she  
gave birth to Him,  
because of this His name is "Wonder", which is  
unexplainable.<sup>136</sup>

His reception of the bodily form was not a limitation but only a means. But in the case of the 'Voice' this was not so, for its existence is contingent. Just as we have seen that the 'voice' is in need of many elements for its existence, so also the birth of John the Baptist (the voice) resulted from different elements, such as the lust

<sup>133</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39.

<sup>134</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 38-39.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, iii.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, vii.

of man and marital union.<sup>137</sup> But why was marital union not needed for the birth of Christ? Mar Jacob's presentation of Mary's virginity touches the core of this difference at its existential level.

Mar Jacob who achieved his intellectual formation in the ambience of the Hellenistic world,<sup>138</sup> applied Hellenistic terminologies to address the issue that we have raised above. This is based on the principle of the participation of an idea in the ideal thing. The concept of an animal participates in the ideal of the animal. Person is not just one reality but participates in two ideals as a whole. This poses the problem of unity. Aristotle posits the metaphysical problem of unity in this way.

What then is it that makes man one; why is he one and not many, e.g. animal - biped, especially if there are, as some say, an ideal animal and an ideal biped? Why are not those Ideas the ideal man, so that men would exist by participation not in man, nor in one Idea, but in two, animal and biped? And in general man would be not one but more than one thing, animal and biped. Clearly, then, if people proceed thus in their usual manner of definition and speech, they cannot explain and solve the difficulty. But if, as we say, one element is matter and another is form, and one is potentially and the other actually, the question will no longer be thought a difficulty.<sup>139</sup>

This is how Aristotle solved this problem:

The reason is that people look for a unifying formula, and a difference, between potentiality and actuality. But, as has been said, the proximate matter and the form are one and the same thing, the one potentially, the other actually. Therefore to ask the cause of their being one is like asking the cause of

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<sup>137</sup> St. John, in speaking about the supernatural birth of the Children of God says that they are not blood-products of man and woman, nor from the concupiscence of human sexual life, nor from the will of man rationally desiring human propagation. Cf. W. Leonard, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to St. John", 981.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. S. Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", 59.

<sup>139</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII. 1045a 15-20, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. II, ed., J. Barnes, New Jersey, 1995, 1650.

unity in general; *for each thing is a unity, and the potential and the actual are somehow one.* Therefore there is no other cause here unless there is something which caused the movement from potentiality into actuality. And all things which have *no matter* are *without qualification* essentially unities.<sup>140</sup>

If we look at the reality of Christ's Incarnation, we understand that it is in fact two realities; human being and God coming together in one person. In the mystery of Mary also, we see that she is participating in two realities; in the ideal of mother and virgin. These are two related issues. The difficulty that one finds in the unity of two natures in Christ remains a metaphysical problem of unity. Mar Jacob addressed this problem in a Hellenistic way. His answer is Semitic. He took the issue of Incarnation first. How can God be God and human at the same time?

The mystery of Mary's virginity concurs with the Incarnation. How can one be a virgin and at the same time a mother? This goes against the principle of non-contradiction, of which the first judgement is: "it is impossible to be and not to be at the same time and in the same respect."<sup>141</sup> "Thus the principle of non-contradiction expresses the radical incompatibility between *being* and *non-being*, which is based on the fact that the *act of being* confers a real and genuine perfection on every being which is absolutely opposed to the privation of that perfection."<sup>142</sup> Mary's status of being mother and virgin concomitantly is not a contradiction, but the potential and the actual somehow becoming one in Mary.

In the study of the symbols of Mary's virginity, it must be kept in mind that a birth without marital union is possible because the Child is the Son of God, who by nature is pure substance. Mar Jacob put forward this issue, with the imagery of "Word" and "Voice." He considered the Word as pure act, pure essence, pure

<sup>140</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII. 1045b 15-20, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1650-1651. [My italics on fifth and sixth lines].

<sup>141</sup> T. Alvira, *Metaphysics*, ET by L. Supan, Manila, 1991, 33.

<sup>142</sup> T. Alvira, *Metaphysics*, ET by L. Supan, 34.



being, and the Voice on the other hand as potency, existence, and becoming. But the “Word” who is pure being, when He wished to come to a becoming, takes *an unlimited way of becoming*. Mar Jacob was confronted with the mystery of the “Word” that came to the limitations of human life. He presented this mystery poetically:

Yesterday He made her and today He came to birth from her,  
for He is older as well as younger than His mother, and it is  
uninvestigable.<sup>143</sup>

So, being trained in the Greek intellectual world, Mar Jacob always addressed the problem from a Hellenistic perspective, but his answer was Semitic and biblical, for he did not consider this as a controversy to be settled or a problem to be solved. The reason why Mar Jacob adopted this way of answering was that the human mind cannot fully comprehend the mystery involved in the virgin birth of Christ.

In the light of his intellectual formation, Mar Jacob presented the apparent contradiction involved in the mystery of Mary’s virginity:

Like guards, the signs of virginity stand at the gate of the  
womb  
and unless they have left, no conception has entered and dwelt  
in the womb.<sup>144</sup>

The “Word” who is pure being, in subjecting Himself to “become flesh”, does not become the “Voice”, but remains as the “Word”, retaining His uncorrupted nature. In His becoming, He was not conditioned by the contingencies of a limited being. In His coming to humanity, it was not necessary for Him to be subjected to the ordinary means of becoming a human. Therefore, His birth did not need the marital union of His parents. The mother conceived Him in her virginity, and she gave birth to Him without causing any

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<sup>143</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 123.

<sup>144</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 70.

violence to her virginity. Thus His mother remained a virgin in birth-giving.

The one who sets in order everything did not come to corrupt  
nature,  
but to set in order things that are corrupt, the Father sent Him.  
He came to set in order Eve in her virginity, who has fallen,  
He did not corrupt the virgin whom He took to become His  
mother.<sup>145</sup>

In the case of John the Baptist, conception was from marital union but he was born as a child of barrenness. This is the wonder that takes place in the case of the "Voice", which Mar Jacob presents as follows:

And lest his conception in the womb be without wonder,  
an old barren woman conceived him after a long time, adding  
to the wonder.  
He was held in honour as much as nature would permit,  
that his story might shine in the world, being a child of  
barrenness.<sup>146</sup>

Mar Jacob shows the difference between the "perfect" nature of the "Word" and the "becoming" nature of the "Voice" in the context of visitation. The "Word", unlimited in space and time, gives the Holy Spirit to John the Baptist, in Mar Jacob's words: the son of the virgin by the mouth of Mary, "stretched forth the spirit"<sup>147</sup> to his envoy. He preferred to present it as the baptism of John the Baptist.

He anointed the babe with the Holy Spirit in the womb of his  
mother,  
and He gave him Baptism in the womb before birth.  
The greeting of Mary was spoken into the ears of the old woman,  
and the Holy Spirit was poured into the soul of the babe.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 78.

<sup>48</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 50.

In order to affirm that Christ is not limited in time and space, Mar Jacob connected the sending of the Holy Spirit to John the Baptist and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the twelve<sup>149</sup> which took place at Pentecost. In presenting these two aspects together, Mar Jacob highlighted the “Word” as always *perfect and wanting in nothing*, which is opposite in the case of the “Voice.” A human child is not able to do the acts of a mature man, but God who is perfect, is not within the confines of human limits. In his *Prose Homily on the Epiphany*, he brings out this distinction very well:

*After me comes a man, but he was [existing] before me. The Word is before the voice and after the voice. The word remains in the soul of its sender and the (same) word remains in the understanding [mind] of the one who has received it. The voice runs from the mouth to the ear and then it is dissolved. It [the voice] bears the Word, brings and supports it to the hearing and then leaves off from it [the Word]. The voice does not issue forth from the soul. John has not descended from heaven; The voice is enlightened by the Spirit from the Word, so as to resound, make known and make heard the beauty of the Word, to bring it [the Word] together through its journey to (the ears of) those who give heed.*<sup>150</sup>

In the analysis of the Old Testament texts which concern the antitypes of the “sealed letter” we have seen that they contained terrible messages. But the “sealed letter” in Mar Jacob’s homilies, is Mary who carries the message of life, forgiveness and peace.

The ambassador approached and gave *the letter that was full of peace*, which was mystically written as in a mystery.

He opened it before her and began to read in his eloquence:

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 78.

<sup>150</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Epiphany*, Syriac Text: Jacques de Saroug: *Six Homélie Festales en Prose*, PO 43 (Fascicule 4, No 196), Critical Edition with a FT by F. Rilliet, Turnhout, 1986, 550-567, ET by T. Kollampampil, 191. [The translator’s italics and square brackets].



“Peace be with you, the blessed one among the women,  
behold, my Lord is with you.”<sup>151</sup>

Quite different from David’s and Jezebel’s incidents, the “sealed letter” in Isaiah’s vision is a type of Mary’s virginity. The “sealed book” which was not opened and read either by the illiterate or the literate (Is 29:11-12) is a symbol of Mary’s virginity for she gave birth to Christ the “Word” without violating her virginity. This contrast sheds light on the renewal, restoration and transformation of the sinful condition of humanity.

### 6.2.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol: “Sealed Letter”

The symbol of the “sealed letter” has a great significance in Mar Jacob’s understanding of Mary’s virginity.<sup>152</sup> First, it reveals the aspects of mystery and wonder in Christ’s coming down to us. When God, the Word came down to the world, the physiological laws were not an obstacle for him, the mother carried Him without undergoing any corruption; and Mar Jacob writes:

She was a letter in which the secret of the Father was written  
which by her flesh He revealed to the world that the world  
might be renewed by it.

O letter - it was not a case of it being written and then sealed;  
but it was sealed first and only then written - a great  
wonder!<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 49.

<sup>152</sup> For Ephrem it was the presence of the Word in Mary’s womb that sanctified her, as if by baptism. Catholic interpreters in the last century tried to find the Latin doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in a stanza which alludes in a typically oriental, indeterminate way, to Mary’s sinlessness; (Cf. E. Beck, “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften Ephräms”, in *OrChr* 40 (1956), 25-29; H. GRAEF, *Mary a History of Doctrine and Devotion*, London, 1994, 57) but St. Ephrem is quite explicit about Mary’s sanctification in his *Hymns on the Nativity*.

<sup>153</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

The second significance of the symbol of the “sealed letter” is the perpetual virginity of Mary. The description that it was sealed when it was written and, without opening it was read, shows Mary’s virginal state at the time of her parturition.

For while it was sealed, it was mystically written;  
although not opened, it was read clearly.  
She became a letter, and what was written on her is the Word;  
when it was read, the earth was enlightened by its tidings.<sup>154</sup>

R. Chesnut, in studying the Christology of Mar Jacob, writes how Mary became the sealed letter: “the Son was sent by an undiscoverable and untreadable path, and he entered the world through ‘the gate without opening’ and came to dwell in the womb of the virgin ‘in the schema of a man’ so that Mary became a ‘sealed letter full of secrets.’<sup>155</sup>

Thirdly, this symbol stands for God’s intervention in the salvation of man. The “sealed letter” conveys the message of God’s coming down to humans in order to lead one from one’s sinful condition to the virtuous state. Mary the “sealed letter”, in carrying this message of divine love becomes the antitype of the “sealed letters” we have seen. To use St. Paul’s words, the letter contained the message of the *cancellation of the bond* (Col 2:14) from the time of Adam and Eve. The “sealed letter” in Mar Jacob’s writing reversed the theme of the “sealed letters” in the Old Testament. If the sealed letter of David was to take away the life of Uriah, if the sealed letter of Jezebel was to kill Naboth and take his possessions, then Mary the “sealed letter” carried the message of peace. Here we notice the upheaval of the mighty ones who used their power for their advantage at the cost of the poor. Mary, conforming herself to God’s plan, spoke of this in the *Magnificat*, “he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree” (Lk 1:51-52).

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<sup>154</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by N. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>155</sup> R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 115.

Thus Mar Jacob, through the employment of the symbol of the “sealed letter”, effectively brought out the mystery that surrounded Mary’s virginal conception and the theology of the Incarnation.

### 6.3. The Symbol: the “Unploughed Land” (*ar’o dlo ethpalhāth* ܐܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܬܝܬܝܬܐ) that Produces Corn

The “unploughed land” is an agrarian symbol which Mar Jacob used to describe the mystery of Mary’s virginity. This symbol stands for the situation of both barrenness and unproductivity. The land which is not ploughed and in which seeds have not been sown remains unproductive and barren. This is a sign of barrenness where there is no scope for the propagation of life even after many years of marital life.

O field, which without a ploughman yielded a sheaf of life,  
and all creation which had been needy was satiated by it.<sup>156</sup>

Mary’s pregnancy is compared to a harvest from an unploughed land. It is a miracle to have a harvest from a land where ploughing and seeding have not occurred. Mary, a virgin, cannot bear a child but when the “power of the Most High will overshadow” (Lk 1:35) her, she conceives a child.<sup>157</sup> The symbol “unploughed land” reveals the principle that what is impossible for man, becomes possible because of God’s mercy, intervention and love. This same principle is evident in the case of barren women who conceive children because of God’s agency. There are stories

<sup>156</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>157</sup> St. Ephrem, at least in two places speaks about Mary’s child bearing without human seed.

He gave birth to the Mother, Eve-he, the man who never was born;  
How worthy of faith is the daughter of Eve, who without a man  
bore a child.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 1:15, ET by K. Mcvey, 65.

In another *Hymn on the Nativity* he writes:

He became, therefore, Joseph’s offspring without seed,  
and His mother’s offspring without man.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 2:13, ET By K. Mcvey, 79.



about women who were barren and old, yet according to God's purpose conceived and gave birth to children.

### 6.3.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the "Unploughed Land"

The Psalmist praises the glory of the Lord who "gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Ps 113:9). The first instance of divine intervention in the case of a barren woman is that of Sarah (Gen 11:30). Although God promised Abraham that he would have as many children as that of the stars (Gen 15:6), Abraham had to wait till his hundredth year to have a son. It was beyond Abraham's comprehension to believe that Sarah would bear a child, for he asked: "Shall a child be born to a man who is hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Gen 17:17). But God confirmed His promise: "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?* At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son" (Gen 18:14). When Isaac was born, Sarah rejoices saying, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me" (Gen 21:6).

Another barren woman whose story is worthy of study is Samson's mother (Judg 13:1-25). The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said: "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son" (Judg 13:3). She had to observe what the angel commanded her. At the end of the story we find that because of God's intervention, Manoah's wife bore a child whom they called Samson (Judg 13:24).

The third instance of a barren woman bearing a child under divine intervention is Hanna, "who had no children" (1 Sam 1:2). On account of her barrenness her rival would irritate her, and "Hanna wept and would not eat" (1 Sam 1:2) because of her distress. Her prayer before the LORD illustrates how longingly she prayed for a child, "O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall

touch his head" (1 Sam 1:11). At the end of the story we read that Elka'nah knew Hannah and when she gave birth to a son, she said, "*I have asked him of the LORD*", and she called him Samuel (1 Sam 1:19-20).

Of utmost importance is God's revelation to Zechariah about the pregnancy of his wife Elizabeth, who was barren and when both were advanced in age (Lk 1:7). An angel of the LORD appeared to Zechariah, when he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense, and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" (Lk 1:13). Elizabeth brought forth a son. The divine intervention was visible not only in that a barren woman gave birth, but also that Zechariah who was dumb began to speak when the child was named John, according to the angel's direction (Lk 1:63-64).

As it was for a barren woman to bear a child, so in the case of Mary who was a virgin, it was totally impossible to conceive a child. In the lives of all the barren women illustrated above, conception resulted from marital union. But in the case of Mary, there was no sexual union, so divine intervention was a necessity for conception. The divine intervention in her conception was quite different from the other events, concerning which Luke writes: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Out of his love for humanity God desired to come down to humanity. In His descent to humanity He chose to be born of the Virgin Mary, and, virginal conception which is impossible in the natural order of things, became a possibility.

The conception of barren women and the election of the prophets reveal how the impossible is made possible. It is not human power but God's grace that makes it possible.

### 6.3.2. Mary: the "Unploughed Land" that Produces Corn

Mar Jacob employed the symbol of the "unploughed land" to describe Mary's virginal conception. As a catechist and teacher of

the Scriptures, he had to explain to the faithful the mystery of the virginal conception, which was beyond human comprehension. While the agrarian imagery of land and ploughing connotes ordinary events, the description of the “unploughed land that produces corn” revealed the miracle that was involved. This is how he describes Christ’s Incarnation:

In this month that scorches the seeds by its severe cold  
the Blessed Seed sprang up from ‘*the earth that had not been  
ploughed*’.<sup>158</sup>

The climatic situation is cold in the months of December and January and plants wither and get scorched. St. Ephrem illustrated the unpleasant situation of nature and demonstrated the Incarnation as humanity’s hope. It is apt to quote his words here:

In January when the nights are long,  
daytime without limit shone forth to us.  
In winter when the whole creation is gloomy  
The beauty that gladdened all of creation emerged.  
In winter that made the earth barren,  
Virginity learned to give birth.  
In January that stilled the birthpangs of the earth,  
The birthpangs of virginity came.<sup>159</sup>

This is also a figurative narration of the time in which Christ’s nativity took place. As regards the time, it was no longer a glorious period for the Israelites, even Nazareth, the place where Christ was brought up, was an insignificant place; this is reflected in Nathan’ael’s question to Philip: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46). This gives us the impression of the unexpected time and the desolate place in which Mary gave birth and brought up her Son. In the next passage the imagery of the “field” was explicitly applied to Mary’s virginal conception.

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<sup>158</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 91. [My italics].

<sup>159</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 4:119-122, ET by K. Mcvey, 98-99.



The field that gives a heap of corn and a pile without any  
 sower,  
 a young girl who remains in the state of birth-giving without  
 any partner.<sup>160</sup>

In analysing the biblical background of the unploughed land, we have dealt with the conception of the barren women. The reason for associating Mary's virginal conception with the conception of barren women is the common element in both instances; that is, the impossible becomes possible through divine intervention. Mar Jacob's text also supports this argument, for he calls Mary's womb a "barren womb."

Blessed is she in whose small and *barren* womb dwelt  
 the Great One by whom the heavens are filled and are too  
 small for Him.<sup>161</sup>

The Great One dwelt in the small and *barren* womb (*b<sup>e</sup>karso z'ōrto wamgāzīto* ܒܟܪܫܐ ܙܝܪܬܐ ܡܡܓܝܙܬܐ). *M<sup>e</sup>gazyūtho* ܡܓܝܙܐ is the noun form of the root *g<sup>e</sup>zo* ܓܙܐ which means *want, lack, bereavement* especially of children, *barrenness; penury: a penurious or destitute life* like that of the anchorites.<sup>162</sup> *Mgāzīto* ܡܓܝܙܐ in Syriac means barren, sterile etc.<sup>163</sup> So, when Mar Jacob called Mary's womb, "barren womb", he deemed her who is not yet united in marriage, and put her on the same level as that of the barren women of the Old Testament. This expression "barren womb" refers to the unproductive state in which she had not received male sperm into her womb. In another passage he presented the virginal conception as "sowing stolen seed" in a "guarded field", thus he ironically brought in the element of divine intervention.

O guarded field, who has thrown into you stolen seed?  
 because the heap of grain that is placed in the middle is not ours.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 114.

<sup>161</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 250.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 68.

<sup>164</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 68.

Mar Jacob puts these lines in the mouth of Joseph, thus alluding to the fact that the conception had taken place without his habitation with Mary.

The field that gives a heap of corn and a pile without any  
sower,  
 a young girl who remains in the state of birth-giving without  
 any partner.<sup>165</sup>

Along with the description of the miraculous virginal conception, Mar Jacob inserted the theme of the restoration of creation to its original state of harmony. The disintegration in creation was caused by eating the prohibited “fruit of the tree” (Gen 2:3). In the place of this fruit Christ promised Himself for human salvation; “[...] he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:54). In the symbolism of the “unploughed land”, Mar Jacob endeavoured to see Christ, the fruit of virginity in relation to the Eucharist by which one re-enters into communion with God. Instead of the “fruit of the tree of knowledge” that brought forth disintegration in creation, the *sheaf of life* satiates creation. Thus he affirmed that through the Eucharist a believer enters into eternal life.

O field, which without a ploughman yielded a sheaf of life,  
 and all creation which had been needy was satiated by it.<sup>166</sup>

The coming forth of a sheaf without the land being sown, a cluster from a vine without being tilled, fruit in a tree without irrigation, and a heap of corn without a ploughman are depictions of the miraculous way in which Christ’s birth took place. In short, employing this symbol Mar Jacob depicted the theme of the virginal conception, and the virginal birth of Christ.

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<sup>165</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 114.

<sup>166</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

### 6.3.3. The Theological Significance of the “Unploughed Land” that Produces Corn

First and foremost, the symbol of the “unploughed land that produces corn” explains Mary’s virginity, precisely in her conception without a marital union. This symbol when applied to Mary discards human intervention in her conception and thus presents it as divine activity.

The second theological aspect is that this symbol presents salvation as a total gift of God. When Mary the “unploughed land” was chosen to produce fruit, this referred to God’s plan of salvation. In the biblical analysis we have seen how God blessed with grace His elected ones in hopeless situations. This blessing was symbolically expressed in Genesis when Lamech named Noah saying “Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands” (Gen 5:29).<sup>167</sup> In Mary, God showered His gift of salvation by making possible what was impossible for humans.

The third significance refers to the particular characteristics of God’s choice. In choosing the weak and the least ones, God teaches humans that it is not human’s merits but His grace that matters. This is clear in the election of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and David. and it reaches its climax in Mary. Mary recognizes this in her *Magnificat*:

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<sup>167</sup> St. Ephrem looks upon Noah as the symbol of the Lord, who was to come and console man from his labour. Concerning how Noah became a type of our Lord, Ephrem writes:

Even Noah yearned to see Him, for he tasted of his benefits:  
if [even] His type preserved the animals, how much [more] does He save souls.

Noah anticipated Him-Noah who surmised that by Him the ark stood still;

If His type saved in this way, how much more will He save in His reality.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 1:57-58, ET by K. Mcvey, 70.



My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; [...] He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away (Lk 1:47-48).

Mar Jacob of Serugh exploited the symbolism of the “unploughed land” to highlight both Mary’s perpetual virginity and her humility which made her worthy of becoming the mother of God. Thus in Mar Jacob’s homilies Mary remained as a model for the believer who trusted in God’s providence. God enables him to say together with St. Paul: “For, from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

#### 6.4. The Symbol: the “Unpruned Vine” (*sātho lo kashuh* ܫܬܗܘܠܐ ܕܟܫܗܘܬܐ) that Produces Grapes

Another symbol that is taken from an agrarian background is that of the “unpruned vine.” St. Ephrem had already compared Mary’s conception to the fruition of a barren vine. This shows Mar Jacob’s dependence on St. Ephrem.<sup>168</sup> The process of pruning a vine is important as far as the vineyard is concerned; and it entails a manipulation in the natural order; its purpose is that the vine branches might become more fruitful. The practice of pruning the vine in order to increase the production was not something new or unknown in the past. Even in the Old Testament times there are references to this practice. The Old Testament reference of

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<sup>168</sup> It is through Elizabeth’s words that St. Ephrem compares Mary to barren vine.

The barren woman cried out as she was accustomed,  
 “who has granted to me, blessed woman,  
 to see your Babe by whom heaven and earth  
 are filled? Blessed is Your Fruit.  
 that brought forth the cluster on a *barren vine*.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 6:16, ET by K. Mcvey, 113.

observing sabbath of solemn rest exhorts people not to prune their vineyard (Lev 25:4-5). Jacob of Serugh used the symbolism of the “unpruned vine” in order to bring out the mystery of Mary’s virginity both because this symbol was familiar to his audience and because it was biblically grounded.

#### 6.4.1. The Biblical Background of the “Unpruned Vine”

In the Old Testament, Israel is presented as the vineyard of the Lord: “For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting” (Is 5:7). The Psalmist recalls how Yahweh brought back Israel-His vine from Egypt: “Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out the nations and plant it” (Ps 80:8). This chosen people were unfaithful before God. God lamented at their poor response: “When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes” (Is 5:4). This unfaithfulness was not only limited to the people in general, but also affected the leaders. It is referred to by Jesus in the New Testament (Mt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-11). The Old Testament speaks about the fate of the people of God who remained unfaithful. Yahweh leaves them *unpruned* so that they may not be blessed with fruits. Yahweh says “*it shall not be pruned* or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up” (Is 5:5).<sup>169</sup> In fact, this *unpruned* situation, is a symbol of both the sinful condition of the people of God and of their unproductive state as a punishment.

Mary, God’s chosen one, stands as a representative of the people of God from whom she was selected to bear fruit. In her person, humanity’s unfaithfulness transcends to the divine realm of faithfulness. Mar Jacob made use of the symbolism of the unpruned condition, the symbol of unproductiveness to unveil the mystery of her conception and virginity.

In Mary, the symbolism of unfaithfulness was substituted by faithfulness; the symbol of punishment was transformed into a symbol of forgiveness and hope. The bearing of fruit without human intervention gave hope to the unpruned vine (the people of

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<sup>169</sup> [My italics]

God); because of God's grace the fruit of salvation is attainable. Now let us see how Mar Jacob made use of this symbol in his homily.

#### 6.4.2. Mary: the "Unpruned Vine" that Produces Grapes

Mar Jacob in his homily *On the Virgin*, writes:

O virginal vine, which though not pruned gave a cluster,  
 behold by whose wine creation, which was mourning,  
 rejoices.<sup>170</sup>

At another place he writes:

The virgin gave to the world the Sweet Bunch of Grapes  
 whose drink comforted the peoples of the earth, who were  
 mourning.<sup>171</sup>

The expression, "*a virginal vine*" which is "*not pruned gives a cluster*" refers to Mary's giving of birth, which was without the involvement of a male partner. The state of not pruning a vine is a sufficient reason for unproductivity. But here in the mystery of Mary's virginity there took place a wonder that Mar Jacob presented as the fruitfulness of the unpruned vine.

The above citations refer not only to the bearing of fruit by an unpruned vine namely Mary's virginal conception, but also to the people who were in a sinful condition, spiritually unproductive like an unpruned vine. The divine intervention in Mary's life gave a ray of hope to them that God's salvific intervention through Christ would enable them to bear the fruits of salvation. In Mar Jacob's words, *the mourning of the people turned out to be rejoicing*. In short, according to Mar Jacob, Mary's virginal conception is in itself a mystery and a sign of hope for humanity, which is longing for salvation.

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<sup>170</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>171</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 124.



This text refers to the dynamic relationship between Mary and Christ. This also indicates Christ's relationship to the believers, and highlights Mary's role in giving Christ, the "Vine", to the world.

#### 6.4.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the "Unpruned Vine" that Produces Grapes

Mar Jacob considered Mary's virginal conception not as a problem but as a mystery which expressed God's salvific intervention which transforms an unproductive situation into a productive one. Here, again, Mar Jacob affirmed that salvation was a total gift to humanity. Mary's virginity which remained intact even in her birth-giving revealed that God's intervention in man's life perfects and restores grace and productiveness. The mystery of the virginal conception, therefore, remains a sign of hope for humanity. Mar Jacob also pointed out the relationship between Mary, Jesus and the people of God. According to Mar Jacob, therefore, Mary is the mediator whose wine (Christ) makes the *mourning-creation, rejoice*.<sup>172</sup>

#### 6.5. The Symbol of the "Thirsty Land" (*ar'o zahītho* ܐܪܘܐ ܙܗܝܬܗ) from which Germinates a Shoot

The fifth symbol that Mar Jacob employed for the explicitation of Mary's virginal conception was the "thirsty land from which germinates a shoot." The "thirsty land" stands for a situation of unproductivity; in nature it is marked by drought, barrenness and fruitlessness. The Jewish tradition looked upon barrenness as a curse (1 Sam 1:6-11 & Lk 1:25), and virginity was not seen as a blessing. In the person of Mary, virginity is no more a curse but a situation in which God exercises His salvific plan. For, as St. Paul says, God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

On this day a shoot from the house of David has germinated to give drink with its *wine* to the *thirsty* and harassed earth.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>173</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 86.

There is another reason why Mar Jacob adopted the phrase “thirsty land which germinates a shoot” to refer to Mary’s virginal conception. The Old Testament makes use of the symbol of the thirsty land to illustrate the receptivity of the human soul that longs for God’s presence. The following section will discuss this biblical background.

### 6.5.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the “Thirsty Land”

The symbol of the “thirsty land” in the Bible can be seen as a metaphor for human’s long lasting expectation for God. The Book of Psalms presents this as the individual’s thirst for God: “O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a *dry and weary land where no water is*” (Ps 63:1). Another psalm expresses the believer’s deep desire for the almighty God: “As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?*” (Ps 42:1). The Lord God, at the same time promised His Spirit to those who wait for Him, this promise is made through Isaiah: “*For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring*” (Is 44:3). Therefore we see that this symbol appears both in the believer’s prayer and in God’s promise.

The Book of Ezekiel compares Israel with whom God was not pleased because of its unfaithfulness, to “a vine” (Ezek 19:10) which is planted “in a dry and thirsty land” (Ezek 19:13). Here the symbol thirsty land represents unproductiveness and punishment. In short, the Old Testament account of the thirsty land gives us both a positive and negative account of this symbol. The positive account is about a person’s longing for God and one’s receptivity to accepting God’s presence. The negative account speaks of the unproductive condition which is the result of unfaithfulness. Mar Jacob exploited the manifold function of the symbolism of the thirsty land in expounding Mary’s virginal conception to show that in the person of Mary, person’s longing for God was realized. In that sense it is the fulfilment of what we see in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, the negative symbol of sinful condition was transformed into a virtuous condition. The following section will analyse the excerpts of Mar Jacob's homilies which employ this symbolism.

### 6.5.2. Mary: the "Thirsty Land" that Germinates a Shoot

Mar Jacob, in applying the symbol "thirsty land that germinates a shoot" to Mary, writes:

Come, Isaiah, see the Immanuel in the cave,  
and seal up the story because the truth has stood firm in your  
prophecy.

A plant has shot up from that *thirsty earth, Mary*,  
which was not sown or planted, just as you proclaimed in your  
prophecy.

Behold the wonder, arise, and marvel with many people,  
because in the same body are the signs of virginity and milk  
belonging to her who is full of wonder.<sup>174</sup>

Mar Jacob calls Mary the "thirsty land", because she represents the believer who desires to see God. He looks into Mary's virginity in birthgiving as the fulfilment of two prophecies: "a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14) and "I will pour water on thirsty land" (Is 44:3). This symbol "thirsty land" became a synonym for Mary, because from her appeared a plant in which no seed had been sown in. Thus here, Mar Jacob established his strong conviction that the long lasting desire of humans of all ages was fulfilled when Mary conceived the Son of God.

Mar Jacob, in bringing out this symbolism in relation to Mary, referred to her worthiness before God. God's promise of sending His Spirit (Is 44:3) and its fulfilment (Lk 1:35) in this "humble, pure, limpid"<sup>175</sup> person showed that she had been worthy in God's sight. There is another important application of this symbolism by

<sup>174</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 120. [My italics].

<sup>175</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.



Mar Jacob. Humanity is also pictured as the thirsty land, and it is relevant to quote Mar Jacob when he pictures Mary as the one who pours water on the thirsty land (the people of God).

The cloud, Mary, full of compassion burst forth and ascended to go to water the thirsty land in which a fruit had come up.<sup>176</sup>

Here, he reversed the role of the elements of symbolism. Mary is depicted as the one who pours water on the thirsty land, which is humanity itself, water symbolising Christ. In applying this symbol to the earth and humanity, Mar Jacob here presented the relationship between Mary-Christ-world. The expression “thirsty and harassed earth” refers to the sinful situation from which humanity had to be saved. The purpose of this triple applications of the “thirsty land” is to highlight the reconciliation of “*all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).

The symbol, “thirsty land” had long been a symbol for Mary for long in the Syriac tradition.<sup>177</sup> St. Ephrem discovered a surprising parallel between Mary and the Samaritan woman, and he seemed to think more highly of the Lord’s spiritual birth from the Samaritan woman’s mouth among the Sichemites who had become believing than of the child’s birth out of Mary. He wrote thus in his *Hymns on Virginity*:

Mary, the thirsty land in Nazareth,  
conceived our Lord by her ear.  
You, too, O woman thirsting for water,  
conceived the Son by your hearing.

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<sup>176</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 63. [My italics].

<sup>177</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Mar Jacob makes use of a symbol that has already been used by Ephrem. We find this in his *Hymns of the Nativity*:

From the thirsty earth gushes forth a Spring  
sufficiently to satisfy the thirst of the peoples.  
From a virgin womb as if from a rock,  
sprouted the Seed from which harvests have come.  
Ephrem, *Hymns of the Nativity*, 4:84-85, ET by K. Mcvey, 96.

Blessed are your ears that drank the source  
 that gave drink to the world.  
 Mary planted him in the manger,  
 But you [planted him] in the ears of His hearers.<sup>178</sup>

Our argument is well grounded if we interpret St. Ephrem's use of this symbol for everyone who longed for Christ, the living water. Thus the symbol "thirsty earth" also speaks about the restoration of human's communion with God, which is brought forth by Christ, Mary's Son. St. Ephrem, applying the symbolism of the thirsty earth, considered Mary's virginal conception as a source of blessing for humanity.

Mary acquired by You all the attributes  
 of married women; conception within her  
 without sexual union, milk in her breasts  
 not in the usual way. You have suddenly made  
 the *parched earth* into a source of milk.<sup>179</sup>

The Well that came out in the wilderness for the world and it  
 [world] drank  
 is the infant in whom the *thirst of the peoples* has been  
 quenched.<sup>180</sup>

Christ is the "living water" (Jn 4:10) that the Samaritan woman wanted to drink so that she "may not thirst" (Jn 4:15). Mary as the thirsty land received the living water into herself, and she gives Him to all those who are thirsty. The Samaritans who gathered around Christ, the "living water" to quench their thirst, said that "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4:42).

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Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 23:5, ET by K. Mcvey, 362.

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 11:4, ET by K. Mcvey, 132.

Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Hollampampil, 116.

### 6.5.3. The Theological Significance of “Thirsty Land” that Germinates a Shoot

Desire for God is the thirst of all the faithful. At the nativity of Christ, this thirst was quenched, and so this symbol has a great significance in Mary, for this is a sign of active receptivity on her side. She is not just an instrument being used by God as He wanted, but a human being who participated and co-operated with God in his plan of salvation. Since the Virgin Mary plays a very creative and positive role in the Incarnation, her virginity takes on a new phase, it is no longer a passive state. This did not remain as a mere state of abandoning her partner and possible offspring, rather it became an option for a higher responsibility; that is, to receive God into her life and share this message with others.

The symbolism of the plant that has come from the thirsty land brings out very clearly Mary's virginal conception. Mar Jacob presented her conception as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy; and when the Lord came to her, He satiated her soul's thirst for God (Ps 63:1). Mar Jacob exalted Mary's role in the restoration of the human race when he said that from the house of David “a shoot” had germinated to give drink with its wine to the “*thirsty* and harassed earth.” God's words that “*I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground*”; are identical with “*I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring*” (Is 44:3). In Mary's case they are one and the same. In short, the symbolism of the “thirsty land”, its longing for God's pouring out of blessing through the Spirit are best expressed in Mary's virginal conception and so it is also an Old Testament fulfilment.

This symbolism stands as a sign of hope for the desolate human race. It is from Mary that a shoot has sprung up that gave drink with its *wine* to the *thirsty* and harassed earth. Thus Mary is presented as the one who gives hope to the desolate world.



## 6. The Symbol: “Gideon’s Fleece” (*geztho d’Gideōn* ) on Which Dew was Showered

Another important symbol which stands for Mary’s virginity is the sign which Gideon had seen.

### 6.1. The Biblical Background of “Gideon’s Fleece”

The hand of Midian prevailed over Israel. At a time when there was no hope of winning a war against the Midianites, God chose Gideon to lead the war: “The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour” (Judg 6:12). But Gideon, not hopeful of winning the war, said: “Pray, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Judg 6:15). On becoming aware that it had been the angel of the Lord who was speaking to him, Gideon said: “Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face” (Judg 6:22) and he became convinced of his assignment. When he was preparing to set out for the fight, he requested a sign from God, “If thou wilt deliver Israel by my hand, as thou hast said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that thou wilt deliver Israel by my hand, as thou hast said” (Judg 6:36-37). Gideon’s request was granted and in the morning, the fleece was miraculously soaked with dew while the ground around remained dry. Gideon asked God to give him another sign: “let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew” (Judg 6:39). God granted him this sign also: “it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew” (Judg 6:40).

### 6.2. Mary: the Fleece and the Son of God: the Dew

The narration of the dew that Gideon saw upon the fleece was utilized by Mar Jacob to speak of Mary and the Son of God, the fruit of her womb. Here the omnipresent God is circumscribed in a simple woman of Nazareth. The mystery of Christ’s dwelling in Mary is well depicted in this sign. This is the best biblical means of teaching how God is present in a special way in a particular object.

This is what is taking place in Mary: in her womb a ‘real circumscribing’ of the Almighty God occurred: “the Fashioner of babes has become a companion for them and He has crawled with the babes.”<sup>181</sup>

The dew that Gideon found in the bowl when he prayed  
depicted the symbol of him who came down upon the fleece like  
rain.<sup>182</sup>

The symbolism of the “dew upon the fleece” is a sign that God can allow His all-pervading presence in a small place and in a small object. Mar Jacob, in calling Mary the “second heaven” had already dealt with the theme of *extension and contraction* in God as a sign of His greatness.

He descended and dwelt in her and her small womb was large for  
Him,  
for a small place *cannot straighten or constrain* Him.<sup>183</sup>

The sign that God performed in Gideon’s fleece, is the confirmation of His promise: “*I will be with you*, and you shall smite the Midianites as one man” (Judg 6:16). In the symbol of Gideon’s fleece, God made Himself known to humans in a miraculous way. The symbolism, when applied to Mary is a clear figure of her virginal conception which was hidden from the human beings.

### 6.6.3. The Theological Significance of “Gideon’s Fleece”

In Gideon’s fleece, Mar Jacob saw a foreshadowing of the Incarnation which took place in Mary’s virginal conception. It is in a mysterious way that the Omnipresent God allowed His presence to be manifested upon the fleece. In referring to this symbol, Mar Jacob also hinted at the mystery of Incarnation and Mary’s virginity.

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<sup>181</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 127.

<sup>182</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 115.

<sup>183</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, FT by M. Hansbury, 68.

This symbol also illustrates that God is present in the life of each one of us to strengthen and support us in our helplessness. But one must remain humble and disposed so that God can act. Gideon, who valued himself as the least of his family, became a “mighty man of valour” because of his trust in God (Judg 6:12). Mary also, in following the Word of God, remained a true model of this receptivity before God. Mar Jacob, in calling Mary, the “second heaven” exalted her greatness:

Heaven and Mary were for Him equal when He dwelt in her,  
yet not equal, for to the one who beholds her Mary is greater.<sup>184</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have dealt with Mar Jacob’s understanding of Mary’s perpetual virginity. I have also shown that he looks at this reality with an approach of love and awe, contrary to ‘investigating’ or ‘prying into it’, which he did not appreciate. Having achieved his intellectual formation in the Greek mentality, Mar Jacob presented the issue of Mary’s virginal conception in Hellenistic terms, but his answer is biblical-Semitic, poetical and symbolic. We have seen how successfully he succeeded in his attempt to present the mystery of Mary’s virginity.

Mar Jacob, in his treatment of Mary’s virginity developed some important theological aspects. Mary’s virginal conception is presented as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. He concentrated not just on Isaiah’s Prophecy of Emmanuel, but presented Mary as the most faithful believer in God. Mary is presented as the antitype of all women who have been coerced into a sinful situation. Her virginity refers not just to her physical integrity, but is a sign of her total submission to God.

Through his symbolic expression, he has also presented salvation as God’s gift to humans, because this is not based on human’s merit but on God’s love, grace and concern. So also his writings give hope and joy to all who are in despair. In the symbol

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<sup>184</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 68.



“unpruned vine” Mary’s virginal conception and the restoration of humanity through Christ, the “fruit of the virginal vine” is illustrated.

The symbol “closed door” which is taken from Ezekiel’s vision of the temple stands for Mary’s virginity in birth and after birth. The second symbol, “the sealed letter” with the message of peace gives hope of salvation for the whole of humanity. “The unploughed land” pertains to her virginal conception. The thirsty earth from which a plant has come forth without anyone sowing a seed brings out effectively Mary’s virginal conception and is a presentation of Christ who has come to redeem humanity.

Another important conclusion of this chapter is that Mar Jacob in his treatment of Mary’s virginity, highlights the mutual complimentary aspect of Christology and Mariology.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# MARY: THE HOPE OF HUMANITY

### Introduction

Mary is a symbol of hope to humanity. Mar Jacob in his homilies highlights that the restoration of humanity to its original state is realized in the life of Mary. The New Testament gives indications to the vital role played by Mary in God's plan of salvation in giving birth to Christ. The testimonies of Simeon and Anna at the temple communicate to us that Christ's birth marks the redemption of humanity, and that Mary co-operated in this redemptive plan. Simeon took Mary's divine Child in his arms and blessed God saying "[...] for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (Lk 2:30-32). So also the Prophetess Anna, upon seeing Mary's Child wrapped in swaddling clothes, proclaims the mystery of redemption "to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38).<sup>1</sup> In both testimonies the centre of attraction is not Mary, but Christ. But it was Mary's attitude, response and co-operation with the divine plan that paved the way for the redemption of humanity.

In delineating the different aspects of the theme "Mary as the hope of humanity", we see also the Christological link of Mariology in the homilies of Mar Jacob. Mar Jacob connected the story of the Redemption with the story of Eve in his Homily *On the Presentation of Our Lord*. Simeon speaks to the new-born child:

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<sup>1</sup> Mar Jacob, in his homily *On the Friday of Passion* and *On Great Sunday of Resurrection* has well brought out how humanity has been redeemed. Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 291; *On the Great Sunday of Resurrection*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 294.

There I shall narrate to Eve regarding your birth,  
 'Your daughter has given birth to an Aged Infant who will  
 redeem you.'  
 I shall console her who was weeping for Abel;  
 When she hears from me about your birth that shall gladden  
 her.<sup>2</sup>

It is through the study of the symbols that Mar Jacob utilizes that we will try to understand the theme: "Mary: the hope of humanity." The "Powerful City", the "Second Eve", the "Ship of the Treasures" and the "New Pitcher of Elisha" are the symbols in Mar Jacob's writings which refer to Mary as the Hope of the humanity. We hope that such a study will bring out the depth and relevance of Mar Jacob's Mariology.

## 1. The Symbol of the "Powerful City" (*mdūtho thuqpo* مَدِينَةُ الْقُوَّةِ)

Mar Jacob, basing his reflections on the Holy Scriptures called Mary "the Powerful City." In the Bible, this symbol refers to God's abode. A biblical analysis of the symbol of the "Powerful City" will help us to understand the mind of Mar Jacob.

### 1.1. The Biblical Foundation of the "Powerful City"

The Holy Scripture speaks of the city of God as the holy habitation of the Most High: "There is a river whose streams make glad *the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High*. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her right early" (Ps 46:4-5). For the Israelites the "fortified city" meant security. Israel thought of this city as Zion: "The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you; and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the *City of the LORD*, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Is 60:14). According to B. Buby, "Historically the word 'Zion' appears as the name of the

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 156.



first stronghold of the city seized by David from the Jebusites. In the Psalms and the Prophets, the word is associated with Jerusalem, the city of David.”<sup>3</sup> The faithful have always desired to belong to the fortified city, and they pray: “Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?” (Ps 60:9; Ps 108:10). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says that He makes His people “a fortified city.” “And I, behold, I make you this day *a fortified city*, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land” (Jer 1:18). So it is no more Jerusalem, a place that is called “a fortified city”, but Israel, a people. This leads us to theme of the covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel.

In the Old Testament, many a times, the people of Jerusalem were thrown out of the city and were made captives. The people return to Jerusalem from exile. The return of the people to Jerusalem prefigures humanity’s return to God. This is symbolic of the return of humanity from the slavery of sin. Jerusalem symbolises the home or Eden, or Paradise from where humanity fell. The theme of Israel’s restoration is theologically presented in the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of Jeremiah where God assures them of His steadfast love: “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:1), and He promises them the restoration in terms of building and planting: “Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! [...] Again you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and enjoy the fruit” (Jer 31:5). The oracle itself gives the hope of restoration to the children of Israel: “There is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country” (Jer 31:17). “Return O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. How long will you waver, O faithless daughter?” (Jer 31:21-22).

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<sup>3</sup> B. Buby, *Mary of Galilee*, Vol. II, *Woman of Israel-Daughter of Zion*, New York, 1999, 58.

The return of the people of Israel which prefigured the liberation of humanity from sin became an actual reality when Mary gave birth to the Son of God. In the Book of Jeremiah there is mention of a woman protecting a man; “For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman protects a man” (Jer 31:22).<sup>4</sup> God’s promise to the exilic people culminates in the coming of a future King prophesied by Jeremiah: “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will dwell securely” (Jer 33:15-16).

The whole history of salvation is a story of the fall of the elected people and God’s intervention to save them. This becomes clear when we closely examine the forty-two generations mentioned in the genealogical narration of Matthew (Mt 1:1-17). Each set of fourteen generations carries its own fate and hope. In short, each stage of the history of salvation represents a “fall” and a “rise” of the people, of which the end point is Christ in whom humanity finds its hope.

## **1.2. The “Powerful City”: A Symbol of a Covenantal Relationship**

The “Powerful City” is a typical symbol of God’s relationship with the people engaged in covenant with Him. This is evident in the covenants that God made with Noah and Abraham. God’s covenant with Noah is called the “covenant of peace” (Is 54:10). God’s covenant with Abraham consisted of the promise of descendants and the possession of land (Gen 15:1-20). The

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<sup>4</sup> This verse has diverse interpretations. Commenting on this passage, C. P. Couturier writes: “A host of explanations have been proposed, ranging from Jerome’s theory of a pure mariological and christological prophecy to Paterson’s hypothesis of a simple grammatical annotation, ‘the feminine replaces the masculine.’” C. P. Couturier, “Jeremiah”, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1, Bangalore, 1968, 326.

circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant. “You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you” (Gen 17:11). God also made a covenant with Moses (Ex 19:1-24:18) and David (1 Sam 7:8-16; 23:5; 1 Kings 8:23-25; Ps 89:2-38).

In Israel’s history, victory is seen as God’s remembrance of His covenant. The psalmist recollects God’s steadfast love: “He *remembered* for their sake his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Ps 106:45). And in another psalm, “The Lord has made known his victory, he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God” (Ps 98:2-3).

With this covenant, Israel became God’s “possession among all peoples” (Ex 19:5) and she promised obedience to God, saying, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Ex 19:8). In short, the purpose of God’s covenants was to form an elected people, to put this in the words of P. Korothe; “The Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant establish the unique relationship of Yahweh with the people of Israel as the people of election.”<sup>5</sup>

That God entered into a covenant with the people is well reflected in the psalms. “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” (Ps 50:5). But, Israel as a covenant partner with God had not been faithful in her covenantal relationship. This is reflected in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice!” (Is 1:21). But even when the covenant partner was unfaithful, God forgave them and gave them new promises.

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<sup>5</sup> P. Korothe, “Election of Israel Versus Universalism”, in *Jeevadhara* 30 (2000), 134.



Through the prophet Isaiah God confirmed: "And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Is 1:26). Regarding the covenants and their culmination in Christ, V. Ruland writes:

The first covenant of works between Adam and his Creator gave man life on condition that he obey the natural law within him, but Adam's fall broke this covenant and transmitted dread legal penalties to his descendants. [...] In Christ, the Father opened a covenant of Grace - foreshadowed progressively in conscience, the promise to Abraham, the Prophets, but now revealed to all believing Christians who were baptized and heard the ordinance of the preached Word.<sup>6</sup>

In making the old covenant, Moses threw the blood upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex 24:8). The new covenant had not been made with the blood of the animals, but with Christ's own blood, as we read in the Book of Hebrews: "he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:18-22).

Mary's words that "all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48) reflect that in her all the hopes and aspirations of the humanity are fulfilled. Because of her positive response to God, we can say that the whole people of Israel is personified in her.<sup>7</sup> She is not reflecting the "bloody city" upon which God makes judgement (Ez 22:1-3), but rather the city of God which "is the joy of all the earth"

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<sup>6</sup> V. Ruland, "Covenant Theology", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington, Vol. IV, 1967, 405.

<sup>7</sup> In Mar Jacob, there is no explicit reference to Mary as the personification of the people of Israel. But he refers to Mary's folk (Israel) by saying, "One humble daughter of the poor folk and one angel met each other and spoke of a wonderful tale." Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 29. That Mary represents the whole people of Israel is recalled by the repeated expression "daughter of David."

Ps 48:2). Mary, can rightly be called the "Powerful City", on account of the role of "woman" realized at Cana (Jn 2:4) and at Calvary<sup>8</sup> (Jn 19:26). As E. G. Mori says, the term the "woman" with which Mary is called by Jesus is the personification of ancient Israel in the fullness of time.<sup>9</sup> In interpreting the Cana account, I. de la Potterie says that by asking the servants to "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5), Mary is encouraging them to the attitude of the covenant through obedience to God in Christ.<sup>10</sup> He explains how she herself became a perfect partner of the covenant: "In Mary the disposition toward the Covenant is realized fully. She is the one who perfectly and always executes what the Father wills. To accomplish the will of God is the unique way to create a new community around Jesus, the new community of the Covenant."<sup>11</sup> This would lead us to conclude that Mary has become the best covenant partner and thus she has become worthy of the name the "Powerful City." In her, the prophecy of the psalmists is also fulfilled: "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (Ps 87:3). Israel's praise in Psalm 98:1 "O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things!", can be compared to Mary's *Magnificat*: "My soul magnifies the LORD, [...] for he who is almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Lk 1:46-49).

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3 There are four references in the Bible which refer to Mary as the "woman." In the Book of Genesis, Mary is spoken of as "woman" whose Son will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The second reference is at the marriage at Cana where Jesus speaks of Mary, His mother as "woman." And the third is, in Calvary Jesus turns to His mother and says "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19:26). The fourth text in which Mary is called woman is in the book of Revelations. John saw a portent in heaven: "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars [...]" (Rev 12:1). We admit that only the Cana incident refers directly to Mary, all the others can be attributed to Mary only because of the meaning they have in the context.

<sup>8</sup> E. G. Mori, "Figlia di Sion", in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, eds., S. de Fiores & S. Meo, Milano, 1996, 526.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. I. de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, ET by B. Buby, New York, 1997, 206.

<sup>11</sup> I. de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, 207.

### 1.3. Mar Jacob's Description of the "Powerful City"

In the light of this biblical foundation, let us analyse Mar Jacob's references to Mary as the "Powerful City."

O powerful city, which captor has pulled down your fortification  
and removed your booty with captives to the strangers?<sup>12</sup>

The context of these lines is Joseph's dilemma in finding that Mary is pregnant. Joseph thinks that Mary is chaste and that she cannot betray him. His conviction of Mary's chastity is expressed by Mar Jacob thus:

Joseph said: "Until now you were true  
and about your chastity I have attested better than all. .  
About your continence all these days I have noted  
and because in your virtue you were chaste, and I rejoiced  
much."<sup>13</sup>

Mary was like a fortified city with "booty"; which signifies her virginal beauty. Since Joseph himself was convinced of Mary's integrity, he seems to have thought of the probability of some violation by force in which she became pregnant, which Mar Jacob considered as the city whose fortification had been pulled down by some captors.

As we have seen in the biblical analysis the symbol of the "Powerful City" stands for the community engaged in a covenant with God. E. G. Mori in the article "*Figlia di Sion*" narrates that this title is actualised in Mary in whom are born the children of salvation by means of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> From the New Testament

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<sup>12</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 68.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 69.

<sup>14</sup> "La componente espressa della figlia di Sion nell'AT non si esaurisce, ma si attualizza in Maria [...] è dimora di Dio nei tempi nuovi, in cui vengono generati, per mezzo dello Spirito, i figli della salvezza." E. G. Mori, "Figlia di Sion", 529.



narratives we learn that it was Mary's faithful attitude that enabled her to be called the "fortified city." Mary became the Zion in which "he who is mighty has done great things" (Lk 1:49), thus fulfilling the prophecy: "On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God"(Ps87:1-3).

Mar Jacob used the expression "Powerful City" to express Joseph's suspicion about Mary's virginity. Joseph might have thought that she had relations with some other man, and to bring out this idea, Mar Jacob employs the expression: "Powerful City", whose "fortification has been pulled down." In this context the expression "fortification", stands for virginity. The New Testament commentators hold different opinions from that of Mar Jacob concerning the chastity of a woman prior to marriage. For example, J. L. McKenzie, when commenting on Mt 1:18-19 writes:

Premarital unchastity in these circumstances was not adultery in the full sense of the word, nor was the repudiation of a marriage contract 'divorce' (Mt 1:19) in the full sense of the word. It is very doubtful that the rigorous capital penalty of the Mosaic Law and the talmudic traditions was enforced in the New Testament times.<sup>15</sup>

But, for Mar Jacob, a woman whose virginal integrity was destroyed was equal to a city whose fortification has been pulled down. He presented Mary's case in such a way that Joseph gradually became convinced of her innocence and accepted her to be faithful. He narrated this in his homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*:

Because in suspicion I had wanted to dismiss you on account  
of your offspring,  
not even by the sword would I abandon your holiness.  
Because then I thought of you as a married woman in adultery;

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<sup>15</sup> J. L. McKenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew", in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, Bangalore, 1968, 66-67.

me, God forbid, that I should turn to marital union that is far off from you.<sup>16</sup>

Thus in Mar Jacob's homily, Mary, as the "Powerful City" represents the fulfilment of the elected people, concretised in Mary a human being, who remained faithful before God. As the letter to the Hebrews witnesses "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb 11:13). But in Mary are fulfilled the prophecies as she gave birth to the "Lion's Whelp, to that Powerful One that Jacob wrote of in his blessings"<sup>17</sup> (Gen 49:8-12). Mary personified the ancient Zion, by remaining faithful to God's covenant. By her fidelity to God, Mary became the model of each one who is called "to be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:4).

As we have seen in the biblical analysis, the concept of the "Powerful City" has a close relationship with the restoration of Israel, which is symbolic of the restoration of humanity in Christ. Mar Jacob in his homily "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth", deals with the restoration of humanity:

The Mighty One stirred forth to resettle the desolate earth,  
But the erring fools imprisoned Him, took Him out and  
crucified Him.  
He descended to restore the world that lay in ruins  
And to open the door for men to enter in to His Begetter.<sup>18</sup>

He presented the drama of human's fall as the captivity of Adam by the rebel. Now the Son of God was sent "to bind the rebel" and "to return to its place the captivity that had been thrust out of Paradise." He continued this in the homily "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth":

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<sup>16</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World", ET from HTM, 37.

He bowed the heavens and came down to walk upon the earth,  
And to take captivity captive from the captor that harrowed it.  
That rebel had taken Adam captive from Paradise  
And had brought him down into this world and dragged him  
upon the thorn-bearing earth;  
But when the Merciful One saw the captivity in sore travail,  
He took pity  
And sent His Son to bind the rebel with His might,  
And to return to its place the captivity that had been thrust out  
of Paradise,  
So that the exiles who returned would be comforted there from  
their tribulations.<sup>19</sup>

In a panegyric work on St. Ephrem, Mar Jacob refers to Mary's role in "restoring" the gender of women that had been brought low because of Eve."

“O daughters of the nations, approach and learn to praise  
the One who delivered you from the error of your fathers.  
[...]  
your silent mouth which your mother Eve closed,  
is now opened by Mary, your sister, to sing praise.  
The old woman (Eve) tied a cord of silence around your  
tongues;  
The Son of the virgin loosed your bonds that you may sing  
out.  
The married one put a muzzle of silence on your mouths;  
(but) the virgin opened the closed door of your tongues.  
*Until now, your gender was brought low because of Eve;  
But from now on, it is restored by Mary to sing Alleluia!*  
Because of the wickedness of Eve, your mother, you were  
under judgement;  
but because of the child of Mary, your sister, you have been  
set free.  
Uncover your faces to sing praise without shame,  
To the one who granted you freedom of speech by his birth.”<sup>20</sup>

Jacob of Serugh, "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World", ET from HTM, 40.  
Jacob of Serugh, *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob Sarug*, ET by J. P. Amar, PO 47 (Fascicule 1 No. 209), Turnhout, 1995.  
-52.



This extract from the homily *on St. Ephrem*, supports our argument about Mary's role in setting humanity free. Eve closed the mouth of womankind and so they could not sing God's praise, but Mary enabled the women to sing God's praise again. Humanity was brought under judgement by the "wickedness of Eve" but Mary who is called Eve's "sister", has restored it.

Again Mar Jacob comes to the idea that the Son of God has come down in view of the return of the "fallen humanity" to the house of the Father:

The Son of God yearned for the daughter of Adam,  
And He descended after her to make her to return on high to His  
Father's realm.

[...]

For our great Lord, though ancient, accepted to become a youth,  
And to bring the youthful maiden to the house of His Father.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.4. Mary: the Faithful Partner in the Covenant

Ritual observance of the law did not make Israel the faithful partner in the covenantal relationship. Fidelity to the covenant in the biblical understanding necessarily demands discipline. In the Sinaitic covenant, God made clear that obedience to the covenant was the condition of the covenant. This is what God said to Moses: "[...] Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation [...]" (Ex 19:3-6). The faithful covenant partner seeks always the law of God: "I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts" (Ps 119:94). God reproaches the one who neglects the law: "What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. If you see a thief, you are a friend of his; and you keep company with adulterers" (Ps 50:16-18). In other words, a faithful covenant partner should follow the precepts of the Lord, should be disciplined and should seek the company of the just.

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<sup>21</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World", ET from HTM, 46-47.

Psalm 50 makes two accusations against the covenant partner who fails to live up to God's promise: 1) disrespect for the law implied in "you hate discipline") and 2) keeping bad company. Mar Jacob presented Mary as the one who restored the dignity of the covenant partner as a faithful one. Though Mar Jacob did not systematically deal with this in a single homily, an analysis of his many homilies reveals that he deals with this theme.

1) Mary's respect for the law and adherence to disciplinary life were affirmed by Mar Jacob when he wrote that "She did not turn aside from the justice which is in the law":

She did not turn aside from the justice which is in the Law, and neither carnal nor bodily desire disturbed her.<sup>22</sup>

Mar Jacob re-enacted the event of the presentation of our Lord in the homily *On the Presentation of Our Lord*:

Mary carried the One who receives all, together with His offering,  
so that according to the law He should bring the offering to the holy temple.  
Joseph carried the young birds which he brought on account of the child  
and he went up to the sanctuary to offer according to the law.<sup>23</sup>

Mary and Joseph faithfully observed the divine and the secular law. Their respect for the secular law is seen as they, in spite of Mary's full pregnancy go to Bethlehem to register their names in the census: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, [...] to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child" (Lk 2:5). Mary's respect for the divine law is seen when Joseph and Mary present Jesus to the temple: "They brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a

<sup>2</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Presentation of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 142.

sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons” (Lk 2:22-24).

If the accusation against the covenant partner was that he thrusts God’s words behind him, Mary as the faithful covenant partner is ready to follow the Word of God. Mary, at the Annunciation expressed her willingness as she said: “let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mar Jacob, in the homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer* depicts how Mary had been prepared to act according to God’s will:

She answered to the watcher with great love, “Let your Lord  
come.  
Behold, I am prepared so that according to His will He might  
dwell within me.  
Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord as you are His servant  
and if He has directed His will towards me, I do not flee  
away.”<sup>24</sup>

2) The second accusation against the covenant partner was that “he keeps the company of the wicked ones.” Mar Jacob presented Mary as a disciplined person, enjoying the company of Joseph the “just one.” In the homily *On the Virgin* he stated that Mary was exalted and was pure from evil, since she evaded worldly thoughts and conversations.

He observed her, how exalted and pure from evil,  
nor stirs in her an impulse inclined to lust.  
And she allows no thought for luxury,  
nor worldly conversation which causes cruel harm.  
Desire for worldly vanity does not burn in her,  
nor is she occupied with childish things.<sup>25</sup>

Although Mar Jacob did not say who the companions of Mary were, he presented Mary as having enjoyed the company of the Lord:

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<sup>24</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 60.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.



The Lord was always set before her eyes;  
on Him she was gazing, so that she might be enlightened by  
Him, and delighted in Him.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of the Old Testament passage we learn that a good covenant partner has to respect the statutes of God, keep the discipline and avoid the “company of the wicked ones.” Although Mar Jacob did not explicitly treat these aspects, his description of Mary in different homilies leads us to the conviction that he treated Mary as fulfilling the norms of the covenant in an excellent way. Joseph, whom the Bible calls a “just man” (Mt 1:19) was her companion.

### 1.5. Theological Significance of the “Powerful City”

In the biblical analysis we have seen that Jerusalem was the powerful city that the people of Israel thought of as the abode of God, and it was there that they wanted to live in. Mar Jacob considered “Mary” as the realization of the “virgin Israel” and as the most faithful partner in God’s covenant with humanity when he calls her the “Powerful City.” She is called the “Powerful City”, for two reasons, she provided the dwelling place for the Son of God and she co-operated with God in His plan for the restoration of the people.

While Mar Jacob called Mary the “Powerful City”, the Second Vatican Council, following St. Paul’s teaching (Gal 4:26), has called the Church “that Jerusalem which is above”,<sup>27</sup> Jerusalem being the “fortified city” where the Old Testament people wished to belong to. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church continues: “It is she [the Church] whom Christ ‘loved and for whom he delivered himself up that he might sanctify her’ (Eph 5:26). It is she whom he unites to himself by an *unbreakable alliance*, and whom he constantly ‘nourishes and cherishes’” (Eph 5:29).<sup>28</sup> The symbol “Powerful City” carries three aspects of the covenant: the

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<sup>26</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> LG 6, A. Flannery, 354.

<sup>28</sup> LG 6, A. Flannery, 354.

imperfection of Israel marked by "Jerusalem", the perfection of Mary in her covenant with God and the "already, but not yet" stage of the Church as regards her perfection. In St. Paul's words "Not that I have already obtained this or am already 'perfect', but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil 3:12). Concerning the perfection or completion of the Church's work St. Paul says: "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). The Church which is on its pilgrim way, looks upon Mary as the model for her pilgrimage. So the theme of "Powerful City" hints at an Ecclesio-typological Mariology, in that Mary has entered into the covenant relationship with God, and has attained the perfection that the Church hopes to achieve.

## 2. The "Second Eve" (*hawa d'tharthen* هَوَا دِثَارْتَهْن)

If Eve represents the fall of humanity, Mary represents its hope, enabling the human race to attain its original state. The parallelism of Mary with Eve and Mary's name as the "New Eve" is a common patrimony of the Fathers. In the interpretation of Genesis 3:13-16, Eve is characterized as the origin of sin, and reference is made to this fact in the Book of Sirach, without mentioning the name of Eve: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Sir 25:24). So, over against Eve, Mary is interpreted as an obedient and faithful woman.

St. Paul's comparison of Adam with Christ very much influenced the early Fathers, and they drew a similar parallelism between Eve and Mary and called Mary the "New Eve." In his letter to the Romans 5:12-19, St. Paul brings out the contrast between the disobedience of Adam by which sin came into the world and the obedience of Christ by which salvation was accomplished. And, in the letter to the Corinthians he writes about the full retrieval of humanity in Christ: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15: 21-22).

## 2.1. The Biblical Foundation of the Symbol the “Second Eve”

There are five references to Eve in the Bible (Gen 3:20; 4:1; Tob 8:6; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:13), but there is no explicit reference to the symbol of the “Second Eve.” In the second letter to the Corinthians St. Paul exhorts the faithful not to swerve from their devotion to Christ. “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). Holy Scripture only says that Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning. It was the Church Fathers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and later period who developed the concept of “Second Eve.”

## 2.2. The Eve-Mary Parallelism in the Fathers

Justin Martyr<sup>29</sup> and Irenaeus developed the Eve-Mary parallelism. It is in the writings of Justin that we find the first reference to Mary as the “New Eve.” We are not sure whether the Eve-Mary parallelism is an original contribution of Justin or that he inherited it as part of the post-apostolic tradition.<sup>30</sup> In his dialogue with Trypho he writes:

[...] and that He became man by the Virgin, in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the

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<sup>29</sup> In the Mariology of Justin the Martyr, as H. Graef observes it is a question of how Eve and Mary responded to the serpent and the angel. “[...] both were virgins when the decisive words were spoken to them; but whereas Eve’s reaction to them meant disobedience to a divine command and resulted in death, Mary obeyed God and so received faith and joy by becoming the Mother of the Saviour.” H. Graef, *Mary a History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> S. Meo says that it was Justin the martyr who first made the parallelism of Mary with Eve in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. Cf. S. Meo, “Nuova Eva”, 916.



Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, 'be it done to me according to thy word.'<sup>31</sup>

Irenaeus is the theologian who explains that the knot fashioned by Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience:

For just as the former was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain (*portaret*) God, being obedient to His word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way the sin of the first created man (*protoplasti*) receives amendment by the correction of the First-begotten, and the coming of the serpent is conquered by the harmlessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death.<sup>32</sup>

Irenaeus affirmed two things; firstly that Christ amended the sins of Adam, secondly, that Mary became the "advocate" of the "virgin Eve."<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus called Mary the "cause of salvation" not only for herself but for the whole human race." According to L. Gambero, Irenaeus called Mary the "cause of salvation"; "precisely because she is the antitype of Eve, who was *causa mortis*" and the cause of salvation to "the whole human race", "since she knew that the Incarnation of God's Son was happening for the sake of human redemption."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Justin, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho A Jew* 100, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, 249.

<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, 547.

<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus' perspective on Mary has been considered as the basis for the later development in Mariology. H. GRAEF, *Mary a History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 56.

The title “Second Eve”<sup>35</sup> is applied to Mary on account of Christ who came forth from her. In the homily *On the Visitation of Mary*, Mar Jacob says that Mary’s motherhood will be exalted on account of Christ, whom she bore:

Mary's attitude is not selfish, but that of sharing. The driving force of Mary's life was love and service which is evident in her visit to Elizabeth after the Annunciation (Lk 1:39-56). She overturned the irresponsible attitude of the human person with positive responses. When Eve wanted to become like God by listening to the serpent, she thought only of her own well-being and joy. When God questioned Eve about what she had done, after she had transgressed His commandments, her answer was: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (Gen 3:13). This means that Eve was not able to take a responsible decision and so she accuses the serpent for

A second Eve cast down a second Adam, that is, Samson,  
And he fell from the greatness wherein he stood.  
She stole from him all the power of his Naziriteship,  
And he became a weakling and a great mockery for the Philistines.  
Eve expelled Adam from Paradise;  
Delilah took from Samson his rank of Nazirite.  
At the world's beginning Adam set up a mirror for thee,  
And midway Samson set up another, if thou wilt but look.  
And behold, Delilah and Eve can be clearly seen for what they are  
By him that would keep himself from ruin.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 82. With the expression “their offspring” in the second line, the author refers to the entire order of mothers.

<sup>37</sup> J. L. Mckenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew", in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, Bangalore, 1968, 67.

Mary and Eve in their symbols resemble a body, one of whose eyes is blind and darkened while the other is clear and bright, providing light for the whole.

Through the eye that was darkened the whole world was darkened, and people groped and thought that every stone they stumbled on was a god, calling falsehood truth.

But when it was illumined by the other eye and the heavenly light which resided in its midst, then humanity became reconciled once again, realizing that what they had stumbled on was destroying their very life.



*On the Virgin* Mar Jacob narrates how Mary's decision became advantageous for the human race:

As reprehensible as Eve was by her deed, so Mary was  
glorious,  
and as the folly of this one, so that one's wisdom is shown up.  
As much as the former is despicable because of that affair,  
so the latter has no need to be ashamed by the matter of the  
Son.

As much as the former is foolish, the latter is wise to the one  
who understands,  
for whatever that one owed, this one repaid.  
By that former the fall, by the latter resurrection for all our  
race;

sin by Eve but righteousness from within Mary.  
By Eve's silence, guilt and the fouling of a name;  
by Mary's discourse, life and light with victory.<sup>39</sup>

Mar Jacob saw the contrast between Eve and Mary. The scene set here was Eve's encounter with the serpent and Mary's encounter with the angel. Eve is reprehensible, despicable, foolish and has a debt, whereas Mary is glorious, wise and has repaid the debt that Eve incurred. It is clear from this passage that Eve caused the fall of humanity and Mary brought about the resurrection of the human race. In other words, Mary's response gives hope to humanity. Her response to Gabriel resulted in the birth of the Son of God who has lifted up the fallen race.

Eve had not questioned the serpent when he led her astray,  
she who by her will kept silent and firmly believed the  
treachery.

The latter maiden heard truth from the faithful one,  
nevertheless in this way she had sought out an explanation.  
The former heard of becoming a goddess from a tree,  
but she did not say: "How will what you mention ever  
happen?"

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Ephrem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Hymnen de Ecclesia*, 37:4-7, CSCO 198, Syri. 84, 92-93, ET by S. Brock, *Spirituality in Syriac Tradition*, SCC 2, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 33.

The Watcher told this one that she would conceive the Son of  
 God,  
 but she did not accept it until she was well informed.  
 That she in her person would ascend to the divine rank,  
 the virgin wife of Adam did not doubt the liar.  
 To this one who would bear the Son of God it was told,  
 but she inquired, sought, investigated, learned and then kept  
 silent.  
 See now how much more beautiful is the latter than the  
 former;  
 because of her beauty, the Lord chose her and made her his  
 Mother.<sup>40</sup>

In Genesis 3:17-18 we read about the curse that fell upon the land as a result of Adam's disobedience: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." Mar Jacob, like the other Church fathers, understood that on account of this primordial fall, humanity was in need of liberation from the bonds and curses of sin. His conviction was that the response of Mary led to the salvation of fallen humanity. He presented this in the homily *On the Virgin*:

Blessed of women, by whom the curse of the land was  
 eradicated,  
 and the sentence henceforth has come to an end.<sup>41</sup>

In the encounter with the serpent, Eve had been led by the "impulse of desire"<sup>42</sup> that led to humanity's fall. The Holy Spirit removed from Mary the "the impulse of desire" and made her holy:

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<sup>40</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 32-33.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

<sup>42</sup> In the *homily On the Forty Day's Fasting*, Mar Jacob shows how through fasting the Son of God won over the *desire* to be recognized as the Son of God and that bread be made from the stones Cf. Mt 4:3. Upon Christ's victory over the temptation Mar Jacob writes: "But our Lord evaded both, so as not to perform out of *desire*, these things that could take

The sin which entered Adam's race with impulses of desire,  
the Holy Spirit cast out from her when He came within her.<sup>43</sup>

Mary was not enticed by any promise as Eve was in her encounter. She responded with faith alone. God gave her an instruction, but there was no coercion on God's part. Mary is seen as a discerning woman, who seeks an answer to her doubts. She received a "sign" and an "explanation" which enabled her to accept God's plan. The sign was the birth of John the Baptist from Elizabeth, the barren woman; and the explanation was that nothing is impossible for God. She declared her readiness to co-operate in God's work. "Be it done to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38). Her reaction: "how it will happen" was not a doubt of faithlessness. Doubt can arise even when there is faith. So, doubt is not the absence of faith. And in Mary's case this doubt led to the revelation of truth, which enabled her to take up a responsible decision. God respected her freedom. She was not just an instrument but a partner.

It was through desire that sin came to humanity. The state of Adam and Eve before the fall was the most desirable state of man. The purpose of the Incarnation was precisely to bring humanity back to that state. In different passages Mar Jacob says that Mary was made like Eve before the fall.<sup>44</sup>

Instead of the mother who wrote among the trees what she  
owed,

the daughter paid all the debts of Adam, her father.

Eve and the serpent with the Watcher and Mary were  
transmuted;

that affair was put right which had become distorted from the  
beginning.

See how Eve's ear inclines and hearkens

to the voice of the deceiver when he hisses deceit to her.

But come and see the Watcher instilling salvation into Mary's  
ear

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place at a later time without passion." [My italics]. Jacob of Serugh *On Forty Days' Fasting*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 243.

<sup>43</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 35; 37; 38.



and removing the insinuation of the serpent from her and  
 consoling her.  
 That building which the serpent pulled down, Gabriel built up;  
 Mary rebuilt the foundation which Eve broke down in Eden.<sup>45</sup>

In his homily *On the Friday of the Passion*, Mary is also referred to as giving hope to humanity: “What is required of Eve? Let her bond be read out. A virgin has contracted the debt, the Son of a virgin will repay (it). The serpent has bitten a maiden, another maiden will give the Medicinal Herb for her cure.”<sup>46</sup>

The freedom to which every Christian is called to, is realized in Mary. In short, a new phase in human history was inaugurated with Mary: the passage from sinfulness to holiness. She brought forth the fruit of life, Jesus himself. Mar Jacob presented this in the *Prose Homily on the Nativity*: “Today, the serpent shall be silent because Gabriel speaks. The lie will be annihilated, for the truth is explained, and the former things shall pass away, so that everything is again renewed by the child-birth of the virgin.”<sup>47</sup> Mar Jacob spoke of the deliverance of Eve at the nativity of Our Lord. “Today the mouth of Eve has been opened so that she can say with an exalted voice and with confidence that her fault has been forgiven by the second virgin who has repaid the debt of her fathers by the precious Treasure to which she gave birth for creation.”<sup>48</sup> The Eve-Mary parallel carries a variety of meanings of which the most important is that in and by Mary all the sinful history of humanity was transformed into the new era of the children of God.

## 2.4. Mother of the Living

In this title “mother of the living”, the theme “Mary as the hope of humanity” is brought out. In Genesis 3:20 we read that Eve

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Prose Homily on the Friday of the Passion*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 281.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Prose Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 133.

<sup>48</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Prose Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 133.

was called the “mother of all the living.” In subjecting herself to the serpent’s temptation she fell short of the name, “the mother of all living.” But Mary became “the mother of the living” as she gave birth to Christ, who is “life” (Jn 11:25; 14:6).<sup>49</sup>

On this day Jacob, the honourable old man, rejoices  
that the daughter who sprouted from his root has called him to  
life.

[...]

On this day let Joseph rejoice and the great Moses,  
for one young maiden has called all mankind to life.<sup>50</sup>

St. Ephrem, the predecessor of Mar Jacob, in his homily *On Our Lord* portrayed how Mary became the “mother of all the living”, in the place of Eve:

And with a body from a virgin He entered Sheol, broke into its vaults, and carried off its treasures. Then He came to Eve, *mother of all the living*. She is the vine whose fence death broke down with her own hands in order to sample her fruit. And Eve, who had been *mother of all the living*, became a fountain of death for all the living. But Mary, the new shoot, sprouted from Eve, the old vine, and new life dwelt in her.<sup>51</sup>

Through her motherhood, Mary gave us Christ, who is “life”, which means that it is Mary’s divine motherhood that gives us hope.

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<sup>49</sup> Here we would like to point out that the title “mother of life” in Mar Jacob’s homily seems to be a continuation of Ephremian thought. For the expression, Mary gave birth to the “Life-giver” comes from Ephrem’s commentary on Diatessaron: “Eve gave birth to the murderer, but Mary gave birth to the Life-Giver. The former gave birth to him who shed the blood of his brother, but the latter to him whose blood was shed by his brothers. The former saw him who was trembling and fleeing because of the curse of the earth, the latter [saw] him who bore the curse *and nailed it on his cross*.” Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron*, II, § 2, ET by C. McCarthy, 60-61.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Ephrem, *Homily on Our Lord*, ET by K. Mcvey, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 278.

When dealing with the glorification of Mary, Mar Jacob narrated that she brought “life” to humanity:

Second Eve who generated Life among mortals,  
and paid and rent asunder that bill of Eve her mother.  
Maiden who gave help to the old woman who was prostrate;  
she raised her from the Fall where the serpent had thrust her.<sup>52</sup>

Mar Jacob considered Adam’s naming of Eve as a prophecy which was fulfilled when Mary gave birth to Christ. The name given by Adam to his wife was only a prefigure of Mary, for it was she who gave birth to the Living One.

Adam chastely generated the virgin, Eve;  
he called her by the name, *mother of life*, and so he was a  
prophet.  
Because from her, by the second birth, life shines forth to the  
world,  
and in her virginity, she also brings forth the Son of God. .  
In Adam’s prophecy, our Lord was prefigured  
who indeed is life; and his mother was the Virgin Mary.  
He named Eve, *the mother of all life*, and prophesied,  
because she brings forth to us life-our Lord who is Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the title “mother of life” enables us to understand that Christ whom Mary brought forth is “life” (Jn 11:25; 14:5), and it is because of him that we live, for he said; “because I live, you will live also” (Jn 14:19).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 36-37. [My italics].

<sup>54</sup> An Anonymous Hymn on the Virgin Mary presents Mary as the source of life and Eve as the cause of death:

In Mary is Eve’s bowed head raised up again,  
for she has carried the Child who seized hold of the adder  
Those fig leaves of shame have been swallowed up on glory!  
Two virgins have there been for humanity,  
one the source of life, the other the cause of death:  
in Eve death arose, but Life shone out through Mary.



## 2.5. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Second Eve”

The significance of the symbol of the “Second Eve” is that Mary gives hope to humanity in terms of “restoration.” Mary brought a new beginning to humanity with her co-operation with the divine will. Mar Jacob through the symbolism of “Second Eve” showed how Mary overcame the obstacle of sin and restored humanity to its original dignity and holiness. In the process of restoration there are two important moments; first, Mary’s positive response to Gabriel at the moment of Annunciation counterbalanced Eve’s dialogue with the serpent which resulted in the retrieval of humanity. Her response led to the “resurrection” of “fallen humanity.” The second is the moment of the inscription of the census. According to Mar Jacob, the inscription of census in Bethlehem marked the beginning of the return of humanity to Eden, which was the purpose of Christ’s Incarnation.

In the garden of bliss, the city of the races, his Lord wrote his  
(name).

In his first country, among his acquaintances, He wrote down  
his name.

And when from heaven this sign was sent out  
Caesar had commanded that this too should come to pass on  
earth.

*Let everyone go to his city and to his village,  
a symbol of the return, because the expelled one was to be  
returned to Eden.*<sup>55</sup>

The return of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem is thus a symbol of the return of humanity. If the name of man was cancelled from the Book of Life, Christ has now inscribed it there again. The above interpretation of Mar Jacob regarding the census at the time of

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Anonymous Hymn on the Virgin Mary, T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, Vol. II, Malines, 1886, 519-590, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, Kollamparampil, 77-78. [My italics].

Jesus' birth shows Mar Jacob's insight and genius in interpreting the significance of biblical passages. According to the Evangelist Luke, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. [...] And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child" (Lk 2:1-5). The culmination of this journey was not only the inscription of their names but also the birth of the Saviour. The name of humanity which was once cancelled by sin, is once more written in the Book of Life through the coming of the Saviour. In short, the return to "write the name" is not simply a census in political history but it represents salvific history. Mary played a vital role in the "return of humanity to its original stage" by which the names of all are written down in the Book of Life.

In Mary's journey to Bethlehem which was symbolic of humanity's restoration, she carried the Saviour in her womb. When speaking about the resurrection of Christ, Mar Jacob speaks about "the race of His mother" being uplifted to the land of His Father.

Today is the first day (of days) in which the First-Born rose up  
from among the dead
so that the race of His mother might be raised up into the land  
of His Father.<sup>56</sup>

In another passage, Mar Jacob wrote that Mary has retrieved womankind to its pristine state by removing Eve's reproach.

"From this time forward womankind will be blessed in me,  
for through me the reproach of Eve is removed from  
womanhood.
"The babe who is in me will crush the head of the great  
serpent;
by Him Adam having been expelled is restored to his heritage.  
"Now therefore Eve who had been ashamed may show her  
face,

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<sup>56</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Great Sunday of the Resurrection*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 294.

and lift her head because of the Lord of Paradise who dwelt in  
me.<sup>57</sup>

In short, the symbolism of the “Second Eve” highlights the theme of Mary’s participation in the mystery of human salvation. If death entered through Eve, life entered through Mary.

### 3. The Symbol: “Ship of Treasure” (*elfo d’ gāze* /لُفَا، غَاذَة/)

The third symbol that Mar Jacob uses for Mary as the hope of humanity is the “Ship of Treasure.” The ordinary meaning of the word “ship” is “sea-going vessel of considerable size.”<sup>58</sup> In Mar Jacob, the “Ship of Treasure” points to a relation between two areas, namely God, the source of richness and the destitute people who are at the receiving end.

#### 3.1. The Biblical Analysis of the Symbol “Ship of Treasure”

There is no explicit reference to the “Ship of Treasure” in the Bible. So we need to analyse “ship” and “treasure” separately in order to understand the significance of this symbol. In the Bible, the word “Ship” does not have a special meaning other than a sea-going vessel, but the term “treasure” is used in different sense which we analyse below.

In dealing with “treasure”, the important Old Testament instruction is about the right way of acquiring wealth and in its sharing with the needy. Both acquisition and sharing of wealth are mentioned in the Book of Sirach: “Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue

<sup>57</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 82.

<sup>58</sup> A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford, 1983, 788.



you from all affliction; more than a mighty shield and more than a heavy spear, it will fight on your behalf against your enemy” (Sir 29:11-13). The importance of sharing one’s possession is taught in the Book of Tobit: “If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity” (Tob 4:9). According to the prophet Isaiah “fear of the LORD” is the “treasure.” “The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness; and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; *the fear of the LORD is his treasure*” (Is 33:5-6).

The concept of “treasure” in the New Testament refers to the goal of the Christian life for which one should strive. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mt 13:44). If one lives with the kingdom in view, one should not lay up treasure on earth. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moths nor rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:19-21). The real treasure is in heaven which the disciple acquires through a *kenotic* principle: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21).

In the biblical concept of “treasure” two aspects are important. The first is the right way of acquiring possessions and its sharing with the needy. The second is of a more spiritual nature which defines “the fear of the Lord” as the “treasure of the righteous one.”

### 3.2. The Symbol of the “Ship of Treasure” in the Syrian Tradition

In the writings of the Syriac Fathers, the Church<sup>59</sup> is represented by a ship on its voyage to the heavenly haven, guided by the helmsman and manned by sailors. In the *Odes of Solomon*, the Odist compares his work of praise to that of a helmsman steering his ship.<sup>60</sup>

In the writings of Aphrahat, there is a reference to the symbolism of the ship. His comparison is that just as skilful pilots sail a ship and safely lead it to its destination, so do the righteous ones act in this world. Here it does not carry any import on Mariology, however, the reference to a ship is relevant, for his narration hints at the intricate, precarious nature of the symbol of the “ship.”

The righteous are the pilots of this world, just as a ship is guided by the skill of its sailors. The ship runs into heavy seas and is thrown this way and that with mighty buffetings, but the skilful pilots stand on watch and bring the ship to the place of rest. If a ship lacks skilful pilots, it cannot reach harbour; the ship sinks and the merchandise is lost. If there were no good men, sinners would be lost; if there were no righteous, the unbelievers would not be preserved.<sup>61</sup>

In the liturgical prayers the symbol of the “Ship of Treasure” is well brought out. We quote four passages from the West Syrian liturgy which refer to this symbolism. The main theme dealt with in these passages is that Mary has borne the Son of God. In carrying Him she blessed the earth, for she carried the One who is the “treasure of the house of the Father”, the “New Life”, “Him who

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<sup>59</sup> R. Murray gives an exhaustive study of the imagery of “the Church as a ship on its voyage to the heavenly haven.” Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Christian Tradition*, 249-253.

<sup>60</sup> *The Odes of Solomon*, ET by J. H. Charlesworth, 749.

<sup>61</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* XXIII, PS II, 27-29, ET by R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Christian Tradition*, 251.

forms the infants in the womb” and the “Pilot, the Lord of all creation.”

Daughter of the poor and Mother of the Son of God,  
you gave wealth to the world that it might live from it.  
*Ship loaded with the blessings*  
*and the treasures of the house of the Father,*  
you came and poured out your wealth on our barren earth.<sup>62</sup>

Come in peace, ship which carried the New Life.  
Come in peace, palace in which the King descended and dwelt.  
Come in peace, garden in which grew the Branch of Righteousness,  
dwelling in which the Mysteries were preserved.<sup>63</sup>

Peace to you, Mary, holy virgin, cries the creation.  
Like a ship you carried Him who forms infants in the womb.  
He carried you and you carried Him.  
And the Wakeful One greeted you with a message of peace.  
Blessed is the lord who came forth from your womb.<sup>64</sup>

Mary was a ship, she bore and sailed into harbour laden with the Pilot, the Lord of all creation.<sup>65</sup>

S. Thykoottam has pointed out that when Christ is presented as the pilot of the ship, the symbol of the “Ship of treasures” might seem paradoxical. According to him, “The Paradox consists in that Mary, the ship, is a creature of God; hence has a beginning. But she carries Jesus, the pilot who is God, hence without a beginning. The one who has a beginning carries the one who is from all eternity.

<sup>62</sup> *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of the Asian Churches*, ET by F. Acharya, Vol. I, *A Weekly Celebration of the Economy of Salvation*, Kottayam, 1996, 55. [My Italics].

<sup>63</sup> *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of the Asian Churches*, Vol. I, 138. [My Italics].

<sup>64</sup> *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of the Asian Churches*, Vol. I, 121.

<sup>65</sup> *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of the Asian Churches*, Vol. I, 46.



As the Incarnate Son of God, Mary carries Jesus and as God, Jesus carries Mary, his Mother.”<sup>66</sup> But when ship is understood as carrying invaluable treasure to its destination, this refers to how much blessing Mary has brought to humanity by conceiving the Son of God.

Simeon the Potter, a poet who flourished around AD 500 also made use of symbolism of the “Ship of Treasures” to Mary.

There were two ships in Judah which carried bounty,  
the blessed Elisabeth, and Mary who believed.  
Elisabeth bore her load in the course of marriage,  
but Mary bore God from the Holy Spirit.  
John prepared the way,  
but Christ taught the crowds  
who cry out to Him at all times  
“Have mercy and pity on us.”<sup>67</sup>

A hymn, which is attributed to St. Ephrem<sup>68</sup> calls Mary a ship that bore a cargo of treasures. Here we read that the poor ones and the departed ones are enriched by the treasures that the ship carried, because Mary bore “Life.”

She [Mary] is a ship bearing a cargo of treasures,  
bringing to the poor the riches of heaven.  
From her the dead too have been enriched, for it is Life that  
she bore.<sup>69</sup>

Come, all you who have discernment, let us wonder  
at the virgin mother, David’s daughter.  
Herself most fair, to the Wonderful she gave birth;  
she is the spring that provides the Fountain,  
she is the ship that bears joy from the Father,

<sup>66</sup> S. Thykoottam, *The Mother of God in the Syriac Tradition*, SCC, 22-23.

<sup>67</sup> A Hymn on Mary by Simeon the Potter, S. Euringer, “Die neun Topferlieder (*Quqyatha*) des Simeon von Geshir”, *OrChr* 13 (1913), 221-235, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 103-104.

<sup>68</sup> Lamy considered this to be a work of St. Ephrem. But S. Brock disagrees with the assumption of Lamy. Cf. S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Anonymous Hymn on Mary*, ed., T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, Vol. II, Malines, 1886, 519-590, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 36.

that carries good news in her pure womb;  
 she took on board, and escorts, the great Steersman of creation  
 through whom peace reigns  
 on earth and in heaven.<sup>70</sup>

Elizabeth came forth at once,  
 and beheld Mary her cousin;  
 she received her trepidation,  
 saying as follows:  
 “Welcome. O Ship whose cargo is God,  
 welcome, O Palace whither the King has come down to  
 reside,<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3. The “Ship of Treasure” in Mar Jacob

We have tried to analyse the symbol of the “Ship of Treasure” from the perspective of the Bible and the Syriac tradition. This will help us to better understand what Mar Jacob means by this symbol. In Mar Jacob’s homilies, this symbol is in various ways expressed: such as “boats of treasures”, “new ship full of riches”, “ship of riches” and “ship which bore treasure”, all signify the same reality. In the first citation, the expression is in plural “boats” and refers to Elizabeth and Mary who have carried John and Jesus respectively.

This Virgin came, great and full of holiness,  
 to rejoice with the old sterile one at the novel conception.  
 Each met the other, the one full of blessings and the daughter  
 of the Levites,  
*boats of treasures* from which the whole world was enriched.  
 Two who brought forth: the One who was announced and the  
 announcer,  
 with the same message full of salvation for the whole world.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Anonymous Hymn on Mary, ed., T. J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, Vol. II, Malines, 1886, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Anonymous Verse Homily on the Virgin Mary, ed., E. Beck, *Nachtrage zu Ephraem Syrus CSCO 363*, Syri.159; Louvain, 1975, ET by S. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 72-73.

Mary and Elizabeth are called *boats of treasures*, because they carried children who preached the message of salvation to humanity. Here, Mar Jacob brings in the role of John the Baptist along with Jesus, not because of his miraculous birth from barren Elizabeth, but because of his mission. He presents John the Baptist in the transition between the Old Testament and the New Testament, as the one who “stands therefore at the frontier of the Old (Testament), and announces to the crowds with wonder about the brilliant beauty of the New (Testament).”<sup>73</sup> According to Mar Jacob, John the Baptist was the “perfecter” of the law initiated by Moses, but Christ brought the “perfection that is above the law.”<sup>74</sup>

The following lines bring out well the significance of the symbol of the “Ship of Treasure” in Mar Jacob. Mary, the poor daughter of Israel has become the mother of the Lord of Kings, just like a ship she carried “treasure.”

Daughter of poor ones, who became mother of the Lord of  
Kings<sup>75</sup>

and gave riches to a needy world that it might live from Him.  
*Ship which bore treasure* and blessings from the house of the  
Father  
and came and poured out riches on our destitute earth.<sup>76</sup>

The above citation calls Mary “daughter of poor ones” and “ship”, signifying that the one whom she carried is greater than herself. This passage refers to the fact that Mary gave Christ to the

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Epiphany*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 191.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Epiphany*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 189.

<sup>75</sup> It is good to note that in Israel the queen mother had a more prominent place than the king's wife. There is an incident mentioned in the life of King Solomon's mother Bethshe'ba. When she went to the King to speak on behalf of Adoni'ah, “the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right” (1 Kings 2:19). She was the daughter of Elia'm and wife of Uria'h the Hittite, (2 Sam 11:3) who was just a soldier of David's army.

<sup>76</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 19.



world, the second line explains that *treasure* and *blessings* have come to the needy world so that “it might *live* from Him.” Mary gave us Christ who enables us to “live.” Just as the “daughter of the poor one who became the mother of the Lord of Kings”, so the destitute earth will be able to “live” by Him. St. John explained how the world can “live” by Him, whom Mar Jacob called the “treasure that the ship bore.” Firstly, it is by believing in Christ that the world “will live”, for He is resurrection and life: “I am the resurrection and life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 6:25-26). Secondly, it is by eating the living bread that has come down from heaven that the believer “will live”; “if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51). So, the believer’s life depends on Christ who lives because of the Father; “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57).

Without mentioning the word “ship”, Mar Jacob points to the meaning of “treasure” in the following passage.

It was beautiful for Mary that she should speak peace,  
for she sowed peace for those far and near.  
She was as a *treasure* full of peace for all mankind;  
great peace was hidden in her for those who were at enmity.<sup>77</sup>

The term “peace” is brought out in all the four lines cited above. We believe that the employment of this term is relevant and mariologically important for two reasons: firstly, in the prophecy of Isaiah the “Prince of Peace” is one of the names given to the child who will be born according to the promise (Is 8:6). Secondly, it was with the word “peace” that the angel saluted Mary. Although the Revised Standard Version of the Bible does not mention the word “peace” in the angel’s salutation: “Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28), the Syriac word in the *pš̄ithā* version of the Bible is *šlōm* ܫܠܡ which means “peace.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 73.

<sup>78</sup> *Kthōbo Qdqīšo: Kthōbo D’diathiqo Âthiqōtho Whdtho*, Syria, 1996, 72.

O guarded ship, where has your swift (prow) sunk?  
And which sea snatched away your merchandise amidst its  
waves?<sup>79</sup>

The Syriac expression of the symbol of the “ship of riches” is *elfo d'gāze* ܐܠܦܐ ܕܓܝܙܐ. *Elfo* means ship or boat, but the word *gāze* ܓܝܙܐ (treasure) has shades of meaning in Mar Jacob. Firstly, the word *gāze* (treasure) is used to refer to virginity. In the *Homily On the Prodigal Son* he writes that the great treasure that a human being can possess by nature is virginity:

Virginity, the great treasure that nature possesses,  
He ruined with adultery and fornication, and it perished from  
him.<sup>80</sup>

In the previous chapter we have seen that Mary remained in the state of virginity even after giving birth to her Son. Was not virginity, one of the treasures that she distributed to the miserable earth? Perhaps influenced by the awareness that virginity is a great treasure, the early Syriac Fathers exhorted the faithful to remain in the state of *b<sup>e</sup>thūltho* ܒܬܘܠܬܗ (virginity). G. Nedungatt, in his study of the covenanters based on the 23<sup>rd</sup> treatise of Aphrahat writes: “Virginity is a free gift from above to be accepted freely and treasured with gratitude and care (Mt 19:11). It is a gift unique in the world, fragile, but beautiful and noble, and to be cherished with love.”<sup>81</sup>

The second meaning of the word *gāzâ* (treasure) is the Eucharist. This is seen in the homily “On the prodigal son”:

There is one Faith and Baptism in God,  
And one is the garment which He bestows on them that are  
baptized in water.  
One is that Sacrifice whereby all sinners find pardon;

<sup>79</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Son Who Squandered His Riches”, *HS I*, 237-238, ET from HTM, *TV 5:4* (1994), 20.

<sup>81</sup> G. Nedungatt, “Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church”, *OCP* 39 (1973), 431.

And with one ring are the *treasures* of the House of God  
sealed.<sup>82</sup>

The third meaning of *gāzâ* (treasure) is faith in Christ. In the homily “On New Sunday and on Thomas the Apostle” Mar Jacob presented the revelation of Christ as perfect man and perfect God. It was Thomas’ obduracy to see and touch the Lord that convinced the disciples about Christ’s divinity and humanity. He said: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe” (Jn 20:25). In making such a demand before the Lord, Mar Jacob said that Thomas was “digging for treasure”:

By the touch of his hand, he confirmed the Son’s human  
nature,  
And by his confession, he clearly indicated that He is also  
God.

[...]

Had he believed without having grasped the Truth with his  
hands,

He would not have made faith so illustrious.

“Except I see and except I touch, I will not believe”;

He longed to see; it was not that he was preparing himself to  
disbelieve.

He was digging for *treasure*, to bring it out into the open,  
So that by showing diligence therein, he might find infinite  
riches.<sup>83</sup>

That Mary brought forth Christ who redeemed us is brought out through the symbol of the “Ship of Treasures.” This also points to the various gifts of the Christian life namely; virginity, faith and the Eucharist.

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<sup>82</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Son Who Squandered His Riches”, ET from HTM, 36-37.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on New Sunday, and on the Church and on Thomas the Apostle”, *HS* II, 649-669, ET from HTM, 62-63. [My italics].



### 3.4. Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Ship of Treasure”

First of all, this symbol stands for Mary’s divine maternity. Mary is the ship in which the Father’s treasure was sent. In bringing Christ to the world, Mary gives hope to the whole world, Mar Jacob explained this in his homily *On the Visitation*.

O cloud of mercy, which is full of hope for all the world,  
all the earth which had been ravaged was pacified by it.  
O ship of riches in which the Father’s treasury was sent  
to the poor in a needy place and it enriched them!<sup>84</sup>

Secondly, as we have seen in the biblical analysis Mary is the one who found the real treasure - for whom the treasure is the “fear of the LORD” (Is 33:6).

The third significance of this symbol is ecclesial. Mary gave “riches to a needy world that it might *live* from Him.” Mar Jacob tells us how the Church was to be enriched by the treasure that the ship carried. This is exactly the invitation that St. Paul extended to the Colossians when he exhorted them to “live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith,” (Col 2:6) because in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). The excerpts from the homilies that have been cited above make clear that it is faith and the sacraments whereby the Christian can “live” in Him. Here is another passage where Mar Jacob sees in Mary the hope of the world:

Peace be upon you, castle of holy things and full of virtues,  
harbour of mysteries and new ship full of riches.<sup>85</sup>

Thus the symbolism of the “Ship of Treasures” highlights the gift of the Son of God whom Mary gave to the world for its salvation.

<sup>84</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 70.

<sup>85</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 46.

#### 4. The “New Pitcher of Elisha” (*quqtho h̄dtho d’Eliša* (قُمُوثَا مَبْأَا د’إِلِيْشَا))

Another symbol of the Old Testament that Mar Jacob used to bring out Mary as the hope of humanity is the “New Pitcher of Elisha.”

##### 4.1. The Biblical Background of the “New Pitcher of Elisha”

The reference to the “new pitcher of Elisha” goes back to the prophetic life of Elisha who fervently desired to “inherit a double share” of Elijah’s spirit (2 Kings 2:9). After succeeding the Prophet Elijah, Elisha performed many miracles, of which purifying the water of a spring confirmed his succession. Commenting on this miracle P. F. Ellis says: “A second miracle is worked as confirmatory of Elisha’s succession to Elijah.”<sup>86</sup> The people of the city present their problem to Elisha: “Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful” (2 Kings 2:19). Elisha who had received the “double share” of Elijah’s spirit, had a bowl brought to him in which salt was placed which he put in the spring in order to make the water wholesome. Then he said, “Thus says the LORD, I have made this water wholesome; henceforth neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it” (2 Kings 2:21). We read that the water became wholesome according to the word Elisha had spoken.

##### 4.2. Mar Jacob’s Application of the Symbol of the “New Pitcher of Elisha”

In Mar Jacob’s homily, the pitcher that was brought to the prophet Elisha was Mary’s symbol. When the prophet put the salt that was in the bowl into the spring, the bad water became wholesome and the land became fruitful.

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<sup>86</sup> P. F. ELLIS, “1-2 Kings”, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1, Bangalore, 1968, 198.

The new pitcher of Elisha has been explained to us  
because it is the young virgin girl in a symbol that sets the  
earth in order.

Also that salt which was cast into the fountain  
is the Son of God who has imparted taste to our insipid state.<sup>87</sup>

In applying this miracle to the Incarnation, Mar Jacob compares Mary to the bowl and Christ to the salt that has given taste to water. Thus, here salt symbolises the Son of God who gives life to the world.

Today the salt from the Most High has descended  
to season our insipidity with His stable taste.<sup>88</sup>

The references to salt in the Synoptic Gospels do not refer to Christ as the salt of the earth. In the Gospels, Christ calls the disciples the “salt of the earth.” “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Mt 5:13) is addressed to the disciple and his “good works.”<sup>89</sup> Its parallel in Mark, “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it?” (Mk 9:50), is addressed to the disciples who “must purify the world and not be contaminated by it or its spirit.”<sup>90</sup> Its parallel in Luke 14:34-35 also refers to the disciple and not to Christ. So, although the New Testament does not refer to Christ as salt, Mar Jacob compared Him to salt, for He gave meaning and “taste” to our life. In the homily *On the Parable of the Leaven*, Mar Jacob said that Christ had restored the taste of the earth.

While teaching, He linked Himself to leaven,  
And in His discourse He disclosed that it is He Who restores  
the earth with His own taste.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 115.

<sup>88</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 90.

<sup>89</sup> J. L. McKenzie, “The Gospel According to Matthew”, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, Bangalore, 1968, 326, 70.

<sup>90</sup> E. J. Mally, “The Gospel According to Mark”, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, Bangalore, 1968, 44.

<sup>91</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven”, which a Woman Took and



Thus Christ's "words and life" will season the world as salt does to the food. Firstly, Christ's words give life to the world, for they are "spirit and life" (Jn 6:63). Secondly, His life was for the salvation of humanity, for the Son of man "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28). Thus the New Testament takes up the theme that Christ gave humanity what it had lost, and that through His teaching and life they should become the salt of the earth. In Elisha's miracle it is read that after Elisha put salt into the spring, he said "henceforth neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it" (2 Kings 2:21). This symbolism, therefore, enables us to see what Christ is to the world and how Mary participates in this task.

#### **4.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbolism of the "New Pitcher of Elisha"**

The symbol of the "New Pitcher of Elisha" is the best symbol among those used by Mar Jacob for highlighting the theme of hope, the hope of salvation. The lack of good water and the unfruitful land, the background in which Elisha works this miracle resembles the sinful condition of man. The salt in the new pitcher has altered the condition of the people. This event is a prefigure of the salvation that our Lord effected in humanity. This symbol points to Mary's role in salvation. The change in the living conditions of the people is made by the salt, but it has been placed in a "new pitcher." It is Christ who saves us, since we read in the Holy Scripture that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If change in the situation of the people is brought about by Christ (the salt), it is Mary (the new pitcher) who presents Him (the salt) to humanity. Therefore this symbol, along with the mystery of Mary's divine maternity, brings out the mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption.

## Conclusion

In the study of Mary as the hope of humanity we have seen the relation of Mariology to Christology. The relation consists in the fact that Mary gave us the Son of God who brought “fallen humanity” back to God the Father. All the biblical symbols that Mar Jacob utilized for this purpose designate the interconnection between Christology and Mariology.<sup>92</sup> The main aspects of this chapter can be delineated as follows:

1) The “restoration of humanity” takes place with the incarnaton and Mary gives a leading role in it. From the homily *On the Virgin*, let us recapture Mar Jacob’s line of thought.

Blessed is she, for by means of her, joy came to Adam’s race;  
through her the fallen arose who had been cast down from the  
house of the Father.<sup>93</sup>

2) Mary, as the forerunner of the Church in her pilgrim way, is a model for the Church. Thus Mary is the type of the Church.<sup>94</sup>

3) We have also seen in this chapter the relevance of ecclesial, sacramental life. For example, in the symbol of the “Ship of treasures” we have seen that the desolate earth is enriched by the treasures, and in the light of Mar Jacob’s work we understand the

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<sup>92</sup> St. Ephrem in his *Hymns on the Resurrection* dwells upon the “Hope” that has come from Mary’s womb:

From on high did Power descend to us,  
from a womb did Hope shine out for us,  
from the grave Salvation appeared for us,  
and on the right hand the King sits for us:  
blessed is His glory.

Ephrem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Paschahymnen*, CSCO 248, Syri. 108, ET by S. Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, Oxford, 1975, 27-28.

<sup>93</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.

<sup>94</sup> We have seen that Mary has been the most faithful covenant partner with God. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, now the Church is “the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city.” LG 9; A. Flannery, 360.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# CHRIST'S REDEMPTION AND MARY'S PARTICIPATION IN IT

### Introduction

The vital role that Mary has played in the Incarnation of the Word has already been dealt with in the previous chapters. Christ who clothed himself in the body of Mary redeemed fallen humanity from sin and death. Here in this chapter we will focus on Mary's participation in the work of redemption. We will do this by analysing Mar Jacob's views on the redemption. We will also highlight Mar Jacob's use of different titles that pertain to Christ, the Redeemer. In the last part of the chapter we will focus on Mar Jacob's views on Mary's participation in the redemption where we deal with Mary's death, glorification in heaven, her relation to the Church and the individual Christian, and her continuous mediation.

### 1. Redemption in Christ According to Mar Jacob

In order to have the right understanding of Mar Jacob's conception on the participation of Mary in the redemption, it is necessary to have a fuller knowledge of his conception of the redemption.<sup>1</sup> According to Mar Jacob divine mercy is the source of salvation. Christ came down to redeem fallen humanity. After Adam had been defeated, humankind took to idol worship and was subject to death. In order to redeem the world from idol worship and death, Christ "the fashioner of babes", fashioned for Himself a

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<sup>1</sup> There is a necessary relationship between soteriology, christology and mariology. There are authors who affirm that soteriology and Christology are the basis of sacramental and marian theology. For example, Cf. P. Yousif, "La vierge Marie et l'Eucharistie chez saint Ephrem de Nisibie et dans la patristique syriaque antérieure", 53.







human body has become the “Heir” who alone was capable of rebuilding the house of Adam. In the homily *On the Friday of Passion*, Mar Jacob has put these words in the mouth of the Redeemer:

The heritage of the ruins has come upon me. I am reconstructing the house of Adam and I am repaying as the Heir. On account of this my Father has sent me, in order to be the Heir to Adam, because He [*the Father*] saw that there was no heir for him [*Adam*] who was able to repay his debts and reconstruct his ruins. I will not let our image be despised in Sheol, I will not allow our resemblance to be trampled upon in the mud by the thieves of perdition. I am the Heir. All that Adam owed, I will repay.<sup>8</sup>

The liberation of Adam was typified when Barabbas was freed. Mar Jacob finds a typological connection between the liberation of “Barabbas” and the salvific liberation of Adam through Christ’s death. In the homily *On the Friday of Passion* we read: “And when Pilate asked them: *Whom do you desire that I liberate for you, they said: Barabbas.* They preferred a brigand, but prophecy cried out through their mouth concerning Adam who was to be liberated.”<sup>9</sup> In Syriac, “Barabbas” would mean the son of the father, which Mar Jacob takes as a synonym for Adam, thus Barabbas’ acquittal is seen as liberation of Adam, that is of humanity. In the following passage we read how Mar Jacob sees the similarity between Adam and Barabbas.

How did it happen that the name of the one imprisoned at that time was called Barabbas, unless it was providence, rich in

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Cross: “Death had entered through Eve’s ear; consequently life entered through Mary’s ear. It was through the wood that humanity had contracted debts; consequently when our Lord came, it was through the wood that he acquitted them.” EPHREM, *St. Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron*, XX § 32, ET by C. McCarthy, 311.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 281.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 290.

discernments, which wanted that by the mouth of the whole people there should be the clamour for Adam and then he would be liberated. *Whom do you want that I liberate for you? They all cried saying; Bar abba.*<sup>10</sup>

All the actions of Christ beginning from the time of His “descent” to humanity and to Sheol, and His “ascent” to the Father are central to human salvation. There are two key words that Mar Jacob used to present the theme of salvation: 1) “descent” (*nheth* ܢܗܬ) into the world and 2) “ascent” (*sleq* ܣܠܩ) into heaven. *Asqen* ܐܣܩܢ (He took us), the aphel form of *sleq* ܣܠܩ is a significant expression in Mar Jacob's understanding of redemption, because this refers to the fruits of the work of redemption, that is, he took us with Him, as he ascended.

### 1.1. The Redemption in Terms of the Descent and Ascent of Christ or the Acts and Fruits of Redemption

We have seen that Mar Jacob depicted salvation in terms of the “descent” and “ascent” of the Son of God into the humanity, out of His “love” for man. We can also see in Mar Jacob's writings a relationship between God and the world; for example, in the homily “Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years” we read: “He loved the world because it was the work of His hand.”<sup>11</sup> The early preachers of Christianity dealt with redemption in terms of the “descent” and “ascent” of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Mar Jacob, in the homily *On the Ascension of Our Lord* explained the relationship between the acts of redemption and the fruits of redemption in the following way: having accomplished the work of redemption “the glorified Bridegroom

<sup>10</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 291.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 38.

<sup>12</sup> R. N. Longenecker, in his Christological study on early Jewish Christianity writes that descent - ascent Christology was a distinctive feature of early Palestinian Jewish Christology. Cf. R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, Great Britain, 1970, 62.

was exalted to the place of His Father.”<sup>13</sup> The ascent of the Bridegroom gave happiness to the bride who had suffered reproach on account of His death. The fruit of redemption can be seen in the narration that when the Bridegroom was ascending in glory, “her head, which had been bent downwards when He suffered dishonour, was lifted up.”<sup>14</sup> The Church expresses her hope of enjoying the fruits of redemption this way:

With love you sought me, with suffering you betrothed me,  
with the sword you redeemed me  
and behold you are glorified; following you let me run to the  
place of your Father.<sup>15</sup>

The way of looking at salvation in terms of descent and ascent is both biblical and Judeo-Christian. For example, according to St. Paul, Christ emptied Himself and humbled Himself and therefore “God has exalted him” (Phil 2:5-9). St. John also refers to the redemption in terms of descent and ascent: “No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man” (Jn 3:13; 6:62). In the first homily *On the Nativity* the word *nheth* ܢܬܗ (descended) is used ten times to refer to the Incarnation of the Son of God. Mar Jacob employed different phrases such as: “Son of the Creator”<sup>16</sup>, “the Living Fire from the essence of the Father”<sup>17</sup> and “God”<sup>18</sup> in order to depict the descent of the Son of God. In the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, Mar Jacob said that Our Lord descended in order to redeem the departed from “the error.” The purpose of Christ’s descent is the redemption of the world which Mar Jacob depicts in the *Second Homily on the Nativity* this way:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, SMS, 808-832, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 343.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 343.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 344.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 124.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Prof. S. Brock rightly points out that the understanding of soteriology as the descent of the divinity into the human condition, seeing that ‘what is



God has performed a great wonder at the nativity of His Son  
who came forth into the open to redeem the world through His  
smallness.<sup>20</sup>

In His descent<sup>21</sup> (*n $\hbar$ eth ܢܗܬܗ*), Christ accomplished the true human destiny from which person had turned away; He united person to God. In the homily "Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years", Mar Jacob describes how Christ descended to renew the world and to lead person to the Father:

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not assumed is not saved' is linked to the Christological position that the divinity and humanity are untied in one *physis*. Cf. S. BROCK, "The Nestorian Church: A lamentable Misnomer", *BJRL* 78 (1996), 31. .

<sup>20</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 95.

<sup>21</sup> In the *Odes of Solomon* there is a beautiful hymn which narrates how Christ in descending to Sheol saved the departed ones. Here we quote the text in full:

Sheol saw me and was shattered,  
And Death ejected me and many with me.  
I have been vinegar and bitterness to it,  
And I went down with it as far as its depth,  
Then the feet and the head it released,  
Because it was not able to endure my face.  
And I made a congregation of living among his dead;  
And I spoke with them by living lips;  
In order that my word may not be unprofitable.  
And those who had died ran towards me;  
And they cried out and said, Son of God, have pity on us.  
And deal with us according to Thy kindness,  
And bring us out from the bonds of darkness,  
And open for us the door  
By which we may come out to Thee;  
For we perceive that our death does not touch Thee.  
May we also be saved with Thee,  
Because Thou are our Saviour.  
Then I heard their voice,  
And placed their faith in my heart.  
And I placed my name upon their head,  
Because they are free and are mine.

*The Odes of Solomon*, 42:11-20, ET J. H. Charlesworth, 771.

He descended to restore the world that lay in ruins  
 And to open the door for men to enter in to His Begetter.  
 And He came to His own to renew it and to rebuild what was  
 overthrown.

He Who existed before this world was  
 Himself came to restore the world in the course of its path.  
 But the manslayer blinded the sons of men,  
 And they knew not *the Lord* when He descended to save  
 them.<sup>22</sup>

According to Mar Jacob, there are three “staging posts” in the course of his earthly sojourn.

He completed his whole course by three staging posts:  
 He resided in the virgin and came to birth, though he was God;  
 Again baptism received him, and yet he was God;  
 And he descended to Sheol, and the world recognized that he  
 was God.<sup>23</sup>

The three stages of Christ’s descent to humanity by which He became one with humans are: 1) His descent to humanity by dwelling in the womb of Mary, 2) His descent into the baptismal font (Jordan) and 3) His descent into the Sheol. About the first stage, that is, Christ’s dwelling in the womb of Mary, Mar Jacob emphasized that Mary was exceptionally good, filled with humility, holiness, and purity of heart, and that “there was not a companion comparable to her in the world.”<sup>24</sup>

In dwelling upon the second stage, that is, Christ’s descent into river Jordan, Mar Jacob connected this with that of Christian baptism and presented how it became beneficial for human salvation. Christ has set baptism as the source of sanctification for the Christian. The Syrian tradition believes that Christ has

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *HS* III, 593, ET by S. Brock, “Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh”, 326.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 23.

sanctified all baptismal fonts by His descent into the waters of Jordan.<sup>25</sup> In the homily *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*, Mar Jacob explains that Christ descended to be baptized and that He placed "fire" in the waters of baptism.

The Holy One came, and reached the waters to descend to be  
baptized,  
and His fire kindled among the waves and inflamed them.

[...]

The Flame came and took off the garments that it was wearing  
and descended to place fire in the waters of baptism.<sup>26</sup>

In getting baptized, Christ's purpose was "the recovery of Adam who was lost." In the homily *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer* we read: "Allow me to descend to seek Adam, the fair image."<sup>27</sup> In the homily "On the Parable of the Leaven", Mar Jacob explained that it was necessary for the Son of God to descend and become one with humanity for the salvation. He used the analogy of the leaven for the description of the impact that the Son of God made in humanity: "in the Son of God the whole race was sweetened."<sup>28</sup> "The leaven is Our Lord, the Word, the Son of God", and in order to mix up leaven with the dough of humankind, the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. S. Brock, "Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh", 327.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 178.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 172. R. N. Beshara has remarked that two conditions were necessary in the divine drama for restoring the lost robe of glory to Adam and Eve: "first and foremost of course is the divine 'self-emptying' (Philippians 2:7), but by the very process of this self-emptying God runs the risk of rejection by Mary, to whom he has given the gift of free will, in other words the choice whether to reject or accept the message of Gabriel. Mary's positive response requires another kind of self-emptying and risk taking: she will undoubtedly be accused of adultery, for which the punishment by Jewish law was death by stoning (John 8:5)." R. N. Beshara, *Ship of Treasures*, U.S.A. 1988, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven', which a Woman Took and Hid in Three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was Leavened", ET from HTM, 49.



But the Godhead, Whose eye is good towards creation,  
Bestowed Leaven and water, and the dough was made.  
She<sup>30</sup> took the meal and placed it in the font of baptism,  
And, taking oil and water, She kneaded it bountifully.  
She took Her Leaven and blest waters and hid them in the  
dough;  
The whole was leaven, the unleavened acquired a good taste.  
Lest *the dough* be moistened with the water of the serpent, and  
so kill man,  
She fashioned man in the water of baptism and he became  
well-pleasing.<sup>31</sup>

Ordinary time is linear and each point in time knows a 'before' and an 'after.' Sacred time, on the other hand, knows no 'before' and 'after', only the 'eternal now': what is

<sup>30</sup> Here, “she” stands for Godhead, since Godhead (*alohūtho*) is feminine gender in Syriac. Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *HS*, III, 415; J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven’, which a Woman Took and Hid in Three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was Leavened”, ET HTM, 49-50.

important for sacred time is its content, and not a particular place in the sequence of linear time. This means that events situated at different points in historical time, which participate in the *same* salvific content – such as Christ's nativity, baptism, crucifixion, descent into Sheol, and resurrection – all run together in sacred time, with the result that their total salvific content can be focussed at will on any single one of these successive points in linear time. This explains, for example, how the baptism of Christ, even though it comes before His death and resurrection in linear time, came to be understood in early Syriac tradition as the fountainhead and source of all Christian baptism.<sup>32</sup>

Christ became one with human beings in His baptism and human beings become His brethren in the sacrament of baptism. Mar Jacob describes this in the homily “On the Parable of Leaven” as “healing the sons of men”:

The Living Leaven kneaded Himself into the sons of men and  
healed them;  
 They acquired His taste, and became one with Him.  
 He brought all men and made them sons of His Father,  
 For by the birth of baptism they became His brethren.<sup>33</sup>

The Son of God, in His coming to nativity, suffering and self-abasement, “redeemed creation” and “made her, the Church, the daughter of God.”<sup>34</sup> Mar Jacob repeats that it was out of love for His people that He came down.

The Son of God yearned for the daughter of Adam,  
 And He descended after her to make her to return on high to  
His father's realm.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven’, which a Woman Took and Hid in Three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was Leavened”, ET from HTM, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 48 & 49.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 46.

The third descent of Christ is the descent into “the womb of Sheol.” In the homily *On the Ascension of Our Lord* eight times the word descent (*nheth* ܢܗܬ) is used in reference to Christ’s descent into Sheol.<sup>36</sup> He has sought the image of Adam in baptism, and in His descent into Sheol He sought after the departed ones and became one among them:

By His death He descended to the abyss of the dead which  
devoured Adam.

Like a courageous Diver He brought up the pearl.

He descended, groped around the depths, visited the buried  
ones, sought out the lost ones.

He slept near the dead and laid His couch among the  
departed.<sup>37</sup>

Christ’s descent into Sheol was a consolation for the dead. If Christ, the Living One had not abased Himself into the belly of the dead they would not have been rescued from perdition.

The Dead went forth, and when He came back,  
He *brought with Himself all the dead to be alive with Him*.  
He reclined in their company upon their couch,

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<sup>36</sup> Christ’s descent into Sheol to lead out the dead who were waiting for the redemption is a theme developed from the earliest times of Christianity. For example, we find the theme of *Descensus* into Sheol in *The Odes of Solomon* which we quote below:

Sheol saw me and was shattered,  
And Death ejected me and many with me  
I have been vinegar and bitterness to it,  
And I went down with it as far as its depth.  
Then the feet and head it released,  
Because it was not able to endure my face.  
And I made a congregation of living among his dead;  
and I spoke with them by living lips;  
in order that my word may not fail.  
And those who had died ran toward me;  
And they cried out and said; Son of God, have pity on us.

*The Odes of Solomon*, ET by J. H. Charlesworth, 771.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 335.



And drinking with them the cup of death, He *made them to live*.<sup>38</sup>

He descended as rain and the dead quivered like plants  
and they rose up on the earth with great trembling from their  
graves.<sup>39</sup>

The Son of God during the thirty years of sojourn on earth abased Himself in view of leading the fallen humanity to the lap of the Father.

For thirty years He walked with her in the land of evil men,  
So that she might be trained with Him, and He then take her  
up to the place of His Father.<sup>40</sup>

Having seen the different aspects of Christ's "descent", we will now consider the theme of "ascent" in the context of salvation. The aspect of "ascent" forms one unit along with the "descent" of Christ. Mar Jacob interprets the dream that the Patriarch Jacob saw at Bethel as the type of the ascent of our Lord (Gen 28:12). He writes that "a ladder of light was placed between the tomb and heaven, the one that had been seen by Jacob at Bethel; and the Lord was standing, not above it, ready to descend, but below it, ready to ascend."<sup>41</sup> The theme of descent and ascent is very much biblical and is based on St. John's Gospel. The concept that when Jesus ascended to heaven, He took us with Him is based on Jesus' own words as read in St. John: "[...] and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). As mentioned earlier, this thinking has been very much rooted in early Christian thinking. For example, in the story concerning the legend of king Abgar, the description of Christ's descent and ascent occupies a prominent place; "He humbled and emptied and abased Himself,

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<sup>38</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven', which a Woman Took and Hid in Three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was Leavened", ET from HTM, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 334.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World", ET from HTM, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Great Sunday of the Resurrection*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 322.

and was crucified, and descended to Hades, and broke through the enclosure which had never been broken through *before*, and raised up the dead, and descended alone, and ascended with a great multitude to His Father.”<sup>42</sup> The bodily birth of the Son of God, His sufferings, and His ascent were in view of uniting man to God. Mar Jacob used the Syriac root word *nheth* ܢܗܬ fifty times (both in noun and verbal forms) in the homily *On the Ascension of Our Lord*. Of these, thirty five times reference is made to the heavenly ascension of our Lord, the others being figurative references to the ascent and descent of the sun,<sup>43</sup> Moses’ ascent on the Mount,<sup>44</sup> Elijah’s ascension into heaven<sup>45</sup> and the Bride’s (the Church) desire to ascend with her Groom.<sup>46</sup> When Mar Jacob speaks about Christ’s ascension to the Father, he writes that He made the human beings also ascend.

He became embodied that He might become capable of  
suffering  
and He carried away the iniquity of the world by the sufferings  
of His crucifixion.  
He brought freedom for the race of slaves that was enslaved  
and He made them ascend until they became sons of His  
Father.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the purpose of Christ’s salvific actions, coming to humanity, death and ascent was “to make us live in the place of His Father.”

He came, died in our place and ascended to make us live in the  
place of His Father,  
so that through His death He might make alive the world  
which was without life.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *The Story Concerning the King of Edessa*, ET Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VIII, 653.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 342-343.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 350.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 343.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 344-345.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 334.

[illegible]

The apostles preached Jesus as the unique Saviour of the world (Acts 4: 9-12; Lk 4:17-21). St. Peter, out of his conviction speaks to the high priest about the risen Christ saying that Christ is the “Leader and Saviour” (Acts 5:31). Through Christ’s mediation man is reconciled to God (1 Tim 2:5-6) and by His death, man is reconciled to God from the state of being enemies (Rom 5:10). Man is redeemed and purchased by the blood of Christ (1 Pet 2:18-19; 1 Cor 6:20).<sup>51</sup> St. John spells out clearly that the “Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world” (1 Jn 4:14) and he records the Samaritans’ profession of faith in Christ as “the Saviour of the world” (Jn 4:42). As P. Kuruthukulangara, in his study *The Feast of Nativity of Our Lord in the Chaldean and Malabar Liturgical Year*,

<sup>51</sup> E. L. Peterman describes beautifully the redemption that God has worked in Christ. "This is to say that redemption is considered as the decisive and definite act of God in Christ in behalf of mankind so that, as regards the divine activity in this order of things, Redemption is accomplished "for once and for all." E. L. Peterman, "Redemption (Theology of)", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XII, 144-145.



sums up: “our redemption is based on the fact that God is incarnate, that this man is the Son of God, and that he, in his capacity of Kyrios, in glory, is at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>52</sup>

Mar Jacob made use of two words to refer to Christ as the Redeemer: Redeemer (*pōrūqo* ܦܪܘܩܐ) and Saviour (*mahyono* ܡܚܝܢܐ). The Syriac word *praq* ܦܪܩ means to redeem, ransom and save<sup>53</sup> from which comes the noun *pōrūqo* ܦܪܘܩܐ (Redeemer). *Mahyono* ܡܚܝܢܐ (Saviour) comes from the root *hyo* ܚܝܐ which means to live; in the aphel form it means to give life, save, keep alive and restore to life.<sup>54</sup> So, these words are not contradictory terms, but complementary, both referring to Christ who has bought us with His blood and restored us to life. In the *Second Homily on the Nativity* both these words are used in the same verse.

I am announcing to you about the *Redeemer* and about the  
*Saviour*  
 who is the Lord Christ who has shone forth from the house of  
David.<sup>55</sup>

Mar Jacob looked into the passion of our Lord, and said that various moments of His passion and resurrection had salvific effects. In order to link the redemption achieved by Christ to the primordial curse, he used three typologically significant expressions; 1) the payment of the debt of Eve, 2) the opening of the garden with Christ's Cross and the entry of the thief into the Paradise and; 3) the clothing of the departed with glory. First, Mar Jacob explains that Christ paid the debt of humanity as He was nailed to the Cross.

With His nails He tore into pieces that bond of Eve, our  
mother,  
 and repaid her debt as well as raised her head that was bent by  
it [*the bond*].<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> p. kuruthukulangara, *The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in the Chaldean and Malabar Liturgical Year*, Kottayam, 1989, 223-224.

<sup>53</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 464.

<sup>54</sup> J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 101.

With His Cross He opened the door of the garden, the  
beautiful bridal chamber;  
and He brought in and set in it the lovely bridegrooms who  
had been expelled.<sup>57</sup>

He received in his side<sup>58</sup> the sword, and seized it from the guard;  
he let him off, and opened up the door for all to enter.  
The Lord of the Garden was struck with the sword as he  
opened it up,

Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 8:4. ET by K. Mcvey, 119.

it having been carefully guarded ever since Adam.  
 Instead of the robber [Adam] who left it, there entered a thief,  
 while his master was wounded as he opened it up before him,  
 to let him in.<sup>59</sup>

The third expression belongs to the category of the fruit of the redemption. In the homily *On the Great Sunday of the Resurrection*, Mar Jacob presents Christ being clothed with the glory of resurrection. At the resurrection, the children of resurrection will also be clothed in the garments of glory.

He was clothed with the glory of the Resurrection from within  
 the tomb  
 and He left behind Him the garments of the dead as well as  
 their trappings.  
 In the new world, no one arises with his clothes;  
 He has something else to put on, for which he is worthy.  
 There are garments of glory for the Resurrection, which are  
 kept for it  
 and from them is provided to the one who attains to it to put on.  
 The garments of the earth remain on the earth, on the dust,  
 and the body clothes itself in glory and rises up from  
 perdition.  
 Great is the glory of the garments of the children of  
 Resurrection;  
 they are clothed neither in linen nor in wool after the  
 Resurrection.<sup>60</sup>

In the following verse he asserts that our Lord took along with Him those who were in the sepulchre.

Then Our Lord drew near to death, as we have said;  
 He died and delivered us, and He rose from the sepulchre and  
 “took us up” with Him.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jacob of Serugh, ET by T. Kollamparampil, “Aspects of the Economy of Salvation According to Jacob of Serugh”, in *Thanima*, Vol. 6, (1998), 33-34.

<sup>60</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Great Sunday of the Resurrection*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 301.

<sup>61</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 93. [My italics].



## 2. Christ the Redeemer – The Biblical Symbols

Mar Jacob used biblical symbols from both the Old Testament and the New Testament to refer to Christ as the Redeemer. So, in order to get into the depth of Mar Jacob's thoughts, it may be helpful to examine in detail the symbols that he used to describe the redemption. The symbols we will deal with are: "Lamb of God", "Physician", "Shepherd" and the "Tree of Life."

### 2.1. "The Lamb of God" (ēmre d'āloho /ܐܠܳܗܳܐ ܠܳܚܳܡ/)

In reference to the redemption, Mar Jacob preferred to use the title "lamb"<sup>62</sup> for Christ. In saying that the Lord of the lambs became a "lamb", he was typologically suggesting the redemption that Christ accomplished in His body.

#### 2.1.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol "Lamb of God"

In the Old Testament, the first aspect to the lamb, as a prefigure of Christ occurred in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, where a lamb was offered in the place of a human being. Abraham went to the land of Mori'ah together with his son, without taking the lamb for the burnt offering. Isaac asked Abraham, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen 22:7). The reply of the father who was going to sacrifice his "only son" was that "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen 22:8). We know that the story ended with the sacrifice of a ram which Abraham saw "caught in a thicket by his horns" (Gen 22:13). Here a lamb was sacrificed instead of Isaac.

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<sup>62</sup> Jewish Christians have considered the titles shepherd and flock as messianic titles, having a good connection with the theme of the lamb. R. N. Longenecker, in dealing with the titles "Shepherd and lamb" writes: "Both have some associations with messiahship in pre-Christian Judaism, yet both also evidence a degree of independence and separate backgrounds. As Christological titles, however, both seem to have been rather unique to the Jewish Christian sector of the early Church and were employed within that cycle of interest to signify the authority, care, suffering and future glory of their Lord." R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 50.

The second aspect to the lamb pertains to the quality of the Passover lamb, that it was to be “without blemish” (Ex 12:5). The Israelites had to dip a bunch of hyssop in the blood of the passover lamb and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood (Ex 12:22). When they would observe this rite after entering the land, they had to tell their children that “It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses” (Ex 12:27). When the Israelites returned after the Babylonian exile, they celebrated the passover, and it was not only those returned from exile but also “every one who had joined them and separated himself from the pollutions of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel” (Ezr 6:20-21).

The third aspect is that with a lamb the Israelites redeemed the firstling in observance of the command that “every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem” (Ex 13:13; 34:20). Israel had also to set apart to the Lord the first offspring that opened the womb once they entered the land of the Canaanites (Ex 13:13-16).

The fourth aspect concerning the lamb in Old Testament pertains to the object of guilt offering. For example, once the leper was cleansed of his disease he had to bring the objects of the offering to the priest on the eighth day (Lev 14:3; 23). As part of the ceremony of cleansing, the priest took the blood of the lamb of the guilt offering and put it “on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot” (Lev 14:25). But if one could not afford a lamb as his guilt offering, he could substitute it with turtle doves or pigeons (Lev 5:7).

The fifth aspect is symbolic. Nathan had been sent to rebuke David upon his hideous act of taking the wife of Uri’ah. In his conversation with David, Nathan compared Bathshe’ba as the one little ewe lamb of the poor man who was like a daughter to him (2 Sam 12:3). The rich man, who unwilling “to take one of his own flock or herd”, in order to prepare for the traveller who had come “took *the poor man’s lamb*, and prepared it for the man who had come to him” (2 Sam 12:4). Upon hearing this comparison, David’s



verdict was "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and *he shall restore the lamb fourfold*, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (2 Sam 12:5-6). David, upon realizing himself to be the rich man who took the lamb of the poor man, accepted his fault saying; "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13); but he was unable to restore the lamb as he himself judged.

The sixth aspect is a comparison of the servant of God with the lamb. Isaiah who compared the suffering servant to "a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Is 53:7) said that the suffering servant "was bruised for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is 53:5).

The New Testament presents Christ as the Lamb of God. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the Ethiopian eunuch had not understood the expression who stood dumb as "a lamb before its shearer" (Acts 8:32; Is 53:7-8). Upon hearing from Philip, who this lamb was, the eunuch believed in Christ and was baptized and "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:32-39). St. Paul was the first one to call "Christ, our paschal lamb" (1 Cor 5:7). St. John called Christ as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29; 36). Jesus observed the passover on the first day when they sacrificed the passover lamb (Mk 14:12; Lk 22:7; Mt 26:17). The early Christian community, seeing the circumstances of Christ's death at the Passover, ascribed the title Paschal lamb to Jesus.<sup>63</sup> The redeemed are depicted as those who have come out of great tribulation and "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14). The Lamb who sits "in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water" (Rev 7:17).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> On the origin of the title "lamb" to Christ, F. X. Durrwell, writes that in "The primitive liturgy (Cf. 1 Cor 5:7-8), the coinciding of the death of Christ with the paschal feast of the Jews, probably contributed to giving this title to Christ." F. X. Durrwell, "Lamb of God", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII, 339.

<sup>64</sup> R. N. Longenecker observes that in uniting the titles Shepherd and lamb, the Jewish Christians were attempting to signal both aspects of the Lord's



The paschal lamb was a significant title for the Israelites in the sense that it was a sign of their delivery from the slavery of Egypt. Christ, in His sacrificial death as “our paschal lamb”, has redeemed humanity from the slavery of sin. St. John’s narration about Christ’s passion that the soldiers “did not break his legs” (Jn 19:33) fits in well with the parallelism of the paschal lamb with the prohibition “you shall not break a bone of it” [that is, of the lamb] (Ex 12:46). He sees the fulfilment of the Old Testament saying that “these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of him shall be broken” (Jn 19:36).

Almost all the references we have seen in the biblical background about the “lamb” are related to Christ. The lamb mentioned in the sacrifice of Isaac is a figure of Christ, and there is an explicit reference to this in the liturgy. At the time of communion in the Syro-Malankara liturgy, the community sings: “Here came forth the tree which has generated the lamb. Here the hands of the Son are nailed, and here is rent asunder the ties of Isaac.”<sup>65</sup> This was how Abraham answered Isaac: “God will provide himself the lamb.” Christ is the lamb whom God has provided for the bonds of our sins. David who could not restore the “lamb” that was snatched by him, prayed to God: “restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit” (Ps 51:12). He knew that “the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God thou wilt not despise.” But the absolute restitution of David’s debt was made only when Christ, “the lamb of God” has been immolated on the Cross. The lamb with which the first born of the sons of Israel was redeemed, also prefigures Christ, for the observance of the sacrifice of all male that first opened the womb was to commemorate the deliverance of Israel “out of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Ex 13:14-16).

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ministry: his sacrificial and the triumphant glory. R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> See the hymn sung during the reception of the Holy Communion in the Malankara liturgy. *Malankara Suriyani Katthōlikkarude Qyamtha-prārthanakramam, Kurbānakramam chērnathu*, (Malayalam prayer book for the liturgical use of the faithful in the Malankara Catholic Church), Trivandrum, 1994. 38.

Christ is certainly our paschal lamb, as St. Paul called Him (1 Cor 5:7). The title "lamb" traces its origin also to Isaiah 53 where the servant of Yahweh is compared to a lamb, "for the chastisements that he had borne made us whole" (Is 53:5). Having seen the biblical foundation of the theme of the Lamb we now will look at Mar Jacob's understanding of the same.

### 2.1.2. Mar Jacob's Treatment of the Symbol "Lamb of God"

Mar Jacob used the symbol of the "lamb of God" to describe the redemption, so as to establish that the salvation preached by the prophets was accomplished in Christ. In the *Prose Homily on the Epiphany*, he presented the Son of God as the Lamb that would accomplish what Moses' lamb had shown as a prefigure. "Behold, *he carries away the sin of the world*, instead of the sacrifices of the Levites. It is about this one I was announcing every day that *after me comes a man and he was existent before me, because he was before me. Behold the lamb of God*. Moses depicted this One in the lamb and made atonement through its blood for the sins of the Hebrews."<sup>66</sup>

The Lord of the sheep who became a lamb among His flock,  
and behold, they carry Him to be a sacrifice before His  
Father.<sup>67</sup>

Mar Jacob presented Christ as the unique sacrifice acceptable to God. In the Old Testament times lambs were offered to God, whom Mar Jacob called the "Lamb." Now, this Lamb became a sacrifice and "He would preserve lambs from sacrifices."<sup>68</sup> Thus in this symbol Mar Jacob highlights the sacrificial aspect of Christ's death on the Cross.

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<sup>66</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Epiphany*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 194.

<sup>67</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, T. Kollamparampil, 83. F. X. Durrwell, in his article "Lamb of God" accentuates the sacrificial aspect of the lamb: "The title Lamb of God makes it clear and precise that this salvific mystery is sacrificial. F. X. Durrwell, "Lamb of God", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII, 339.

The Shepherd of the earth became a lamb within His own  
pasture;  
and the wolves saw and began fleeing in their fright.<sup>69</sup>

The early Christian community reflected on the circumstances of Christ's death at the Passover and compared Jesus to the Passover Lamb. This comparison is relevant because of its relation to the redemption; and to use the expression of C. J. Peifer: "as the sacrifice of the lamb is a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt and in later times was regarded as expiatory, so Christ's sacrificial death at Passover has redeemed mankind from the slavery of sin."<sup>70</sup>

Today let the pastors and their flocks rejoice  
because the Lord of the flock has become for us a lamb to  
carry off our iniquity.<sup>71</sup>

Isaiah depicted the suffering servant as the lamb who bore sin: "he bore the sin of many" (Is 53:12). But Christ, as "our paschal lamb" not only bears the sin of others, but carries them away.<sup>72</sup> Mar Jacob used the symbol "Lamb" as the powerful representation of the salvation achieved in Christ; in the homily *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer* he writes:

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<sup>69</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on the Nativity*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 98.

<sup>70</sup> C. J. Peifer, "Passover Lamb", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. X, 1071.

<sup>71</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 127.

<sup>72</sup> It is St. John who provides us with different aspects of the symbol "lamb of God." F. X. Durrwell, concentrating on the theological aspect of this theme in St. John writes: "This springs from the fact that the whole Gospel account is enclosed between this proclamation of Jesus as the lamb of God and the evocation of the prefigurative lamb (1:29 and 19:36); also from the fact that John emphasizes (18:28; 19:14, 31) the coincidence between the immolation of the prefigurative paschal lamb and the hour of Christ when the destiny of Christ is accomplished, His whole being is revealed (8:28), and when He is presented to men as the object of their faith (3:14-15; 12:32; 19:35, 37). It can be concluded that the paschal lamb was for St. John a privileged image to express the mystery of Christ." F. X. Durrwell, "Lamb of God", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII, 339.



This is the Lamb who presented Himself to become a  
sacrifice.

This One carries away the sin of the world in His being  
sacrificed.<sup>73</sup>

In the biblical analysis we have seen that those who could not afford to offer a lamb for the guilt offering, could substitute it with turtle doves and pigeons (Lev 5:7). In the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* Mar Jacob explains that since no one could afford to buy Christ – the lamb to be sacrificed for our sins – His father gave Him freely to us. Hence, it is God's mercy and gratuitous love that lies behind our redemption. The poet-theologian sings "You poured for me Your precious blood and with it You bought me."<sup>74</sup>

### 2.1.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol "Lamb of God"

The first significance of the title of the "lamb of God" is that Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was an important step in his becoming a source of blessing, for God promised him "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gen 12:3). When God saw that Abraham was willing to offer his only begotten son Isaac as a sacrifice, He let him spare Isaac by substituting a lamb for him. Much more important was the sacrificial death of the Only Begotten Son of God, who shed His blood in order to become a blessing *for the families of the earth*. What was shown as a prefigure in Abraham's sacrifice became a reality in Christ's death.

The second significance of this symbol is the sacrificial aspect that is seen in the Old Testament prefigure, the "paschal lamb."

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Baptism of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 170.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the Appendix of this book, i.

Christ has been immolated on the Cross for our salvation. It was by killing the paschal lamb and sprinkling its blood on the door that the Israelites were saved. In his homily “On the Veil of Moses”, Mar Jacob shows how the humanity was saved by Christ’s blood:

It is Christ’s blood that is spoken of in the blood of the lamb.  
A great mystery is expounded in this small matter:  
Moses has taught you, by the blood of the lamb that he  
sprinkled on the doors,  
that you should moisten your lips with the blood of the Son  
each day.

For the mouth is man’s gate which emits  
both songs and words, both praise and abuse, of various kinds,  
and David asked that there should stand a guard over it.

[...]

Receive from Divinity’s cup the blood on your lips  
and it will prove a sure door-keeper for you.

The doors of the People were sealed with the blood of the  
lamb,  
do you seal your door with the blood from the side of God’s  
Son.

Dye your tongue, your lips, your mind too  
in the blood of your Lord, and he will guard you from harm.<sup>75</sup>

Thirdly, we would point out how this symbol is related to the Divine Liturgy, the sacramental ambience in which the faithful *moisten their lips with the blood of the Lamb*. In Exodus 13:13-16 we read that the people of Israel redeemed the first born of men by offering a lamb. During liturgical worship the Church also commemorates Christ as the first born of God who redeemed humanity. For example, in the Eucharistic offertory of the Syro-Malankara liturgy, when the host is offered, the priest prays in a low voice “First-born of the heavenly Father (*Bukro dālōho* ܒܘܟܪܐ ܕܐܠܐܗܐ), receive this first born from the hands of your humble servant.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, this symbolism is used in the liturgical celebration to signify the salvific sacrifice of Christ, the lamb who gave Himself “for many.”

<sup>75</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 76-77.

<sup>76</sup> *The Divine Liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Rite*, 3.

## 2.2. Christ the “Bridegroom” (hathno ܚܬܢܐ)

The second symbol which was employed by Mar Jacob for the treatment of redemption was the “Bridegroom.” As we will soon see, this symbol depicts the intense love of Christ towards the Church that led to the Bridegroom’s self sacrifice for the salvation of the bride.

### 2.2.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol of the “Bridegroom”

Moses, the “leader elect” who would deliver Israel from the slavery of Egypt was addressed “you are a bridegroom of blood” by his wife Zippo’rah (Ex 4:25). The Lord met him at a lodging place and sought to kill him.<sup>77</sup> Then Zippo’rah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’ feet with it, and said, “surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” (Ex 4:25). Thus Zippo’rah’s quick action remedied the situation, and God was appeased.<sup>78</sup> In the following verse we read that “*you are a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision*” (Ex 4:26); with this action she saved her husband. The context is that Moses had been called to lead the people from slavery. But he had not fulfilled the ceremony of the circumcision of his son which was the sign of the covenant between God and his people (Gen 17:9-12). The expression “bridegroom of blood” means “a bridegroom who has shed blood” which here fits Moses (and not Yahweh) perfectly. Moses failed to circumcise his son on the eighth day, according to Genesis 17. There are different interpretations about the expression “bridegroom of blood”, and, as W. H. C. Propp opines “almost all assume that the reference to

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<sup>77</sup> Why should God attack the man whom He has chosen to liberate Israel? W. H. C. Propp’s explanation might give us an answer. “According to the Heroic Tale narrative archetype, the Hero may be “branded” before his final showdown with the Adversary with either an injury or a protective sign. The sign may even be received from a friendly princess. Thus the traumatic experience of Moses’ family at the night-stop is not entirely unexpected.” W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York, 1999, 233.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 235.



blood is fully explained by 'she applied to his legs' (Ex 4:25). That is, with either the flint or the foreskin, Zipporah transfers Gershom's blood to Moses."<sup>79</sup> J. F. Craghan says that the meaning of verse 26b "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me" was unclear at the time of composition. However he brings it out as a salvific prefigure. "The blood-smearing in this circumcision rite is like the Israelites' smearing of blood on their doorposts when the tenth plague threatened the life of their firstborn (Ex 12:12-13). Hence this scene looked to the tenth and final plague (Ex 12:29-32) and to the redemption of the first-born in Israel (Ex 13:1-2, 11-16)."<sup>80</sup> Zippo'rah cut off her son's foreskin, and by touching the feet<sup>81</sup> of Moses with it, saved him. We see in this event a prefigure of "the real bridegroom of blood" who shed his blood on the cross and gave His life for the salvation of the bride.

The concept of the community of Israel as the bride of the Lord was a prominent theme in the Old Testament, and the people found joy in this conception. "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Is 61:10). Israel will no more be called "Desolate" but "My delight is in her", and the prophet depicted God's relationship with Israel "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Is 62:1-6). The initial fidelity of Israel was pictured as bridal. In the days of struggle, especially when Israel passed through the desert, she remained faithful to God as a bride. The Lord asked Jeremiah to

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<sup>79</sup> W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 234.

<sup>80</sup> J. F. Craghan, "Exodus", in *The International Bible Commentary*, eds., W. L. Farmer, et al., Minnesota, 1998, 415-416.

<sup>81</sup> This is seen as a reference to the genitals of Moses. J. F. Craghan, "Exodus", 415. Such a connotation occurs because of the different meanings the word *ragalayim* has. "*Ragalayim* may also denote feet or genitalia, and it is probably Moses' penis that is meant here." In the following pages W. H. C. Propp adds that "The natural inference is that, either by touching the bloodied flint to Moses' penis or by applying and removing Gershom's foreskin, Zipporah *symbolically* circumcised her husband." W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 234; 236.

speak to Israel thus: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer 2:2).

The eschatological glory is also symbolised in terms of a bridal relationship in the Book of Revelation. "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev 19:7-8). Again in another chapter we read: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). St. Paul applied this symbol to the community of believers in Christ: "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as 'a pure bride' to her one husband" (2 Cor 10:2).

### 2.2.2. Mar Jacob's Treatment of the Symbol of the "Bridegroom"

Mar Jacob, who saw the mystery of Christ and the Church as veiled<sup>82</sup> in the Old Testament looked at the relationship between Christ and the Church in terms of the Bride and Bridegroom. He called the Church the "bride of light"<sup>83</sup> and the "daughter of light",<sup>84</sup> who came from the side of Christ.<sup>85</sup> The source of his discussion is Genesis 2:24, where we read: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." Mar Jacob viewed this instruction as "a picture and type and image for reality"<sup>86</sup> which was fulfilled in the crucifixion. "In the crucifixion he completed the types that had been depicted, and the

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<sup>82</sup> Cf Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74-75.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74.

<sup>84</sup> Jacob of Serugh "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 81.

<sup>85</sup> Cf Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 81.

<sup>86</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 76.

hidden mystery that had been covered revealed itself.”<sup>87</sup> He developed this theme in the homily “On Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue” by interpreting Jacob’s marriage with Rachel (Gen 29), in whom “The beauty of the Church was hid.”<sup>88</sup> He said that the betrothal of Our Lord to the Church took place at His Passion and that it had been prefigured in Jacob’s story. Jacob’s rolling away of the stone from the mouth of the well to give drink to Rachel’s sheep was the indication that “the shadow of the Great Shepherd rested upon him.”<sup>89</sup> This is how Mar Jacob describes it:

Rachel’s beauty, when he saw her, stirred Jacob  
To roll away the stone that was too heavy for many men.  
The fair sight of her so multiplied his strength,  
That he lifted the mighty rock and gave the sheep to drink.  
The mystery of the Church lay on her face like a jewel,  
And righteous Jacob, her betrothed, longed greatly for her  
countenance.<sup>90</sup>

According to Mar Jacob, the whole scene of Jacob’s encounter with Rachel pointed to the Son of God’s mystery. He drew three features of Jacob’s encounter with Rachel which unveil the mystery of Christ’s betrothal with the Church. 1) Unlike in the normal kissing of the betrothed, Jacob had wept as he kissed Rachel, his betrothed; which means that their kiss was not out of lust but this was to signify the suffering of the Son.

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<sup>87</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, ET by S. Brock, 81. Mar Jacob acknowledged that it was St. Paul who expounded the mystery of the Christ - Church relationship. For the details see the homily “Concerning the Veil on Moses’ Face”, S. Brock, 74-75; Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, *HS* III, 208-223; ET from HTM, *TV* 4:4 (1993), 52.

<sup>88</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 53.

<sup>89</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 56.

<sup>90</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 54.



It was fitting that he wept and suffered when he kissed her,  
To signify in his betrothal the suffering of the Son.  
With his tears he painted an image of the Son of God's  
Passion;  
For when He betrothed the Church, He suffered, and only then  
was she betrothed.<sup>91</sup>

2) Another feature of Jacob's encounter with Rachel was that Jacob's tears were compared to Christ's blood with which He redeemed the Church.

Jacob gave Rachel tears when he espoused her,  
And Our Lord sprinkled the Church with His Blood when He  
redeemed Her.<sup>92</sup>

3) Mar Jacob also sees the rolling away of the stone as a prophecy. Just as the stone covered the well, so the sin of the world was lying upon the well of the world. Our Lord saw the stone of sin and He removed it in order to meet the Church, his bride.

He looked upon the Church as on Rachel, and longed to meet her;  
And, like the stone, He rolled away sin, which was a heavy thing.  
He opened the baptismal font for His betrothed, that she might bathe there,  
And He drew, and let the nations of the earth drink like those flocks.  
He lifted up the weight of sins by His mighty strength,  
And He revealed a spring that gave a sweet draught to all the world.  
He poured out a drink for all the nations for the Church's sake,  
Even as all the flocks did drink for Rachel's sake.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 55.

<sup>92</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 55.

<sup>93</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue”, ET from HTM, 55-56.



betrothed, she throws His clothes to Him. Thus the Synagogue too, because her mind fled away from the Holy One, all the worship and the priesthood which He had donated to her, she threw and wrapped it around upon Him in the veil of the altar.<sup>95</sup>

Although the Synagogue rejected the Lord of the Sanctuary, God in his mercy calls all men to communion with Him. In the homily "On Our Lord and Jacob", we read:

God hath called all nations into communion with Himself,  
For there is not a nation on the earth that is not His,  
The calling of the nations was dear to the Creator,  
That all should draw near and become His through  
repentance.<sup>96</sup>

In the homily "On Why Our Lord Abode for Thirty Years", Mar Jacob dwells upon the theme that He embraced the human nature in view of becoming one with humanity which is presented in the image of a spousal relationship.

He was heavenly yet He willed to take a daughter of the  
earthly,  
And for love of her He became earthly and murmured not.  
Even unto becoming a babe in a manger and in swaddling  
clothes,  
He came down and humbled Himself, to grow up according to  
her dimensions,  
So that from growing up with Him, and from His  
companionship, she might take on His habits  
And go with Him when He was taken up to Him that sent  
Him.  
Because of His love for the daughter of the poor, He became  
poor,  
So that she might be awed and abashed, beholding how much  
He abased Himself.  
From her race, which was brought low, He became incarnate,

<sup>95</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 287.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, on the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue", ET from HTM, 60.



So that she, as the daughter of that race, would be with Him in  
one mingling.

Since it is written that the two of them shall be one, He  
became embodied in her;

He became one with her, made her one with Himself, and  
behold, they are one.

He became the Son of man and made her, the Church, the  
daughter of God,

And by His commingling, the saying is established that the  
two are one.<sup>97</sup>

In Mar Jacob's narration there are two important moments in Christ's bridal relationship with the Church. First, the mystical union of Christ with the Church takes place in Christ's baptism in Jordan, which Mar Jacob interprets as having been foreseen by Moses.

With the exalted eye of prophecy Moses saw Christ,  
and how he and his Church would be one in the waters of  
baptism;  
he saw him putting on her in the virgin womb  
and her putting on him in the baptismal water:  
bridegroom and bride are spiritually perfected as one,  
and it was concerning them that Moses wrote ‘the two shall be  
one.’

$$\left[ \begin{array}{c} \vdots \\ \vdots \\ \vdots \end{array} \right]$$

The betrothed made the daughter of day to enter a new womb,  
and the testing waters of baptism were in labour and gave  
rebirth to her:  
he rested in the water and invited her: she went down, clothed  
herself in him and ascended;  
in the Eucharist she received him, and so Moses' words, that  
the two shall be one, were established.  
From the water comes the chaste and holy union  
of bride and bridegroom, united in spirit in baptism.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years before He Wrought Miracles in the World”, ET from HTM, 47-48.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 74-75.

The second important moment that marks Christ's spousal union with the Church is the moment of His death.

Women are joined to their husbands in the same way  
as the Church is joined with the Son of God.  
What bridegroom died for his bride apart from our Lord?  
What bride sought out a slain man to be her husband?  
Who, from the world's beginning, ever gave his blood as the  
bride price?  
Apart from the crucified one, who sealed the marriage with his  
wounds?  
Who has ever seen a corpse placed in the midst of the wedding  
feast,  
with the bride embracing it, waiting to be comforted by it?  
At what wedding, apart from this, did they break  
the body of the bridegroom for the guests in place of other  
food?  
*Wives are separated from their husbands by death,*  
*but this bride is joined to her beloved by death!*  
He died on the cross and gave his body to the bride made  
glorious,  
and she plucks and eats it every day at his table;  
he opened up his side and mixed his cup with holy blood  
he gave it her to drink that she might forget her many idols.<sup>99</sup>

The origin of the Church and sacraments takes place from Christ's side at the moment of His death on the cross. In this narration, we find the parallelism between the first Adam from whose side came forth Eve his wife, and Christ the second Adam from whose side came forth the Church His bride.

Adam and Eve in the likeness of the image of his only-  
begotten:  
he slept on the cross as Adam had slept his deep sleep,  
his side was pierced and from it there came forth the daughter  
of light-  
water and blood as an image of divine children

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<sup>99</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 75-76. [My Italics].

to be heirs to the Father who loves his only-begotten.

Eve in prophecy is the mother of all that lives,

and what, if not baptism, is the mother of life?

Adam's wife bore human bodies subject to death,

but this virgin bears spiritual beings who live for ever.

Adam's side gave birth to a woman who gives birth to  
mortals,

while our Lord's to the Church who gives birth to  
immortals.<sup>100</sup>

### 2.2.3. The Theological Significance of the symbol of the "Bridegroom"

The significance of this symbol is that Christ is here presented as the fulfilment of the Old Testament teachings concerning the God-man relationship. Mar Jacob, in using the symbol of the "Bridegroom", the prominent Old Testament symbol for depicting Yahweh's relation to His people, has shown how Christ has become one with the New Israel. Moses' instruction regarding spousal union (Gen 2:24) and Zippo'rah's words that "you are a bridegroom of blood" (Ex 4:25) prefigured the reality of Christ's union with the Church, His beloved bride.

Although the symbol of the "Bridegroom" is treated here in the context of redemption, since Christ's relationship with the Church is the model of Christian spousal relationship, Mar Jacob's treatment of the theme is very significant in the understanding of the sacrament of marriage. St. Paul exhorted the faithful to live after the model of Christ's relationship with the Church: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 6:25). Christ in giving His life for human salvation, has set the model for every spouse in mutual relationship. Mar Jacob developed this theme of Christ's love for the Church using poetic imagery.

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<sup>100</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 81.



## 2.3. The Symbol of the “Physician” (osyo ʾṣy)

The Physician is another symbol pertaining to Christ as the Redeemer. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament people looked upon God as a healer or physician, and redemption was viewed as healing man from disease, that is from sin.

### 2.3.1. The Biblical background of the Symbol of the “Physician”

In the Old Testament God revealed to Israel as a healer. God told them: “I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD, your healer”, and this was accomplished provided they heeded God’s commandments and kept all His statutes (Ex 15:26). The Book of Sirach, especially chapter 38, gives the conception that the people of Israel had recognized God as the healer (Sir 38:2) and that through the physicians God healed them (Sir 38:6-8). The passage continues: one who commits sin is considered sick and in order to be healed “may he fall into the care of a physician” (Sir 38:15). Sickness was associated with sin and healing followed the remission of sins; for St. James the Apostle writes: “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jas 5:16). Israel had understood sickness as resulting from sins and that the “Word of God” healed the sick, this is reflected in the Psalms as: “he [the LORD] sent forth his word, and healed them” (Ps 107:20). Healing is required for a man who has sinned. We read David’s prayer in the Psalms: “O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against thee!” (Ps 41: 4). And in another psalm the prayer is: “O LORD, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me” (Ps 30:2). In the Book of Chronicles we read that the Lord heals the whole cosmos when man repents and turns to God: “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14). When man turns to God and says no more “Our God”, the work of their hands (idols), God will heal them “I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them” (Hos 14:1-4). There is no medicine for the “incurable” hurt and “grievous” wounds of Israel

(Jer 30:12-13), because their guilt is great and sins flagrant (Jer 30:14-15). Though the situation is such, God will heal them: “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the LORD, because they have called you an outcast: ‘It is Zion, for whom no one cares!’” (Jer 30:17). Although Israel’s hurt is incurable, and the prophet tells the people that “There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you” (Jer 12:13), and the Lord reveals to them as their physician: “I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, [...]” (Jer 12:16).

The Gospels present Jesus as healing the sick from all their sickness. Jesus restored not only their health of body but also of their soul. Jesus told the paralysed man whom people brought to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (Lk 5:20). Thus He became the “healer” of souls and healed sinful people from their sins. Christ’s fame, perhaps was best known among His contemporaries in Galilee as one who heals and that is why “they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them” (Mt 4:24). The centurion beseeched Jesus on behalf of his servant who had been paralysed. He strongly believed in Jesus as a physician and that even His words would heal his servant. Therefore, when Jesus said to him “I will come and heal him”, he responded “only say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Mt 8:8). Jesus’ healing ministry was not exclusively for his followers, He healed even His enemies who were wounded and in need of healing. After Judas had betrayed Jesus and those who were with him knew what would follow, one of His followers cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. But He admonished them saying: “‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him” (Lk 22:50).

The different aspects of healing that we have seen in the Old Testament, especially Isaiah’s prophecy that “with his stripes we are healed” (Is 53:5) is realized in Christ, the physician. St. Peter in his



letter confirmed the fulfilment of this prophecy, "by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24).<sup>101</sup>

### 2.3.2. Mar Jacob's Treatment of the Symbol of the "Physician"

Before coming to Mar Jacob's treatment of the symbol, it is good to note that this symbol had already been in use in Syriac literature, before Mar Jacob's time.<sup>102</sup> The Syrian tradition saw the Saviour as a physician. This is reflected in the legend concerning the establishment of Christianity in the city of Edessa. King Abgar had heard that Jesus was healing the disease "without drugs and roots." So, he wrote to Christ: "either that Thou art God, who hast come down from heaven, and doest these things; or that Thou art the Son of God, and doest these things."<sup>103</sup> And, Abgar invited this "Physician" to Edessa to heal his disease. In the story we read that Jesus sent Thaddaeus to him who healed and baptized him. This legend gives the concept of the Redeemer as the "physician."

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<sup>101</sup> The Latin liturgy has beautifully presented Christ the Saviour as "the Lamb" and "the Physician" in the context of the communion. The priest says "this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper", to which the people respond: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but say the word and I shall be healed." *The Weekday Missal: A New Edition, Weekday Masses for The Proper of Season. Ordinary Time. The proper of Saints Occasional Masses. Masses for the Dead Complete with Readings in One Volume*, 1333.

<sup>102</sup> Concerning the use of this term in the Syriac tradition R. Murray writes: "By the time of the *Odes of Solomon* its main features were fixed, together with its link with Christ's baptism, and the grotesque idea that death devoured Christ greedily as one more tasty morsel, to find that he had taken deadly poison - the "medicine of life," a favourite Syriac name for the Eucharist, and therefore applicable to Christ himself-which he must vomit up. This became a dramatic, perhaps consciously comic, feature of the developed *Descensus* tradition. By the time of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* certain phrases had become fixed and hallowed." R. Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity", in *East of Byzantium, Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, DOP 1980, ed., N. Garsoïan, Washington D.C., 1982, 13.

<sup>103</sup> *The Story Concerning the King of Edessa*, ET *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, 652.



Mar Jacob treats the figure of God as physician in two ways. First, Christ the incarnate God heals man from sickness. B. P. Sony has brought out this theme in his study on the doctrine of creation and anthropology of Mar Jacob. Christ shed His blood for our sickness, that is for the forgiveness of the sins of the world and His sorrow in the garden is a sign of relief and healing.<sup>104</sup> He presented Christ as the restorer and healer of physical nature.<sup>105</sup> In the light of the Gospel narrative concerning Christ's life and activities Mar Jacob presented Him as the Physician.

He went out as a Physician to the wounds (inflicted) by the  
accuser  
 and He drove away the sickness from humanity by (His)  
healing.  
 He healed the sick, He cured diseases, He cleansed the lepers.  
 He opened (the eyes of) the blind, made the bent straight,  
made the deaf hear.<sup>106</sup>

In the homily *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer* he depicts Christ as the physician who came to heal all those who were in need.

Today the Physician has come to the wounded  
 bandaging, healing and giving reward to those who are healed.  
 Today the Doctor came to all who were fractured,

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l'anthropologie*, 232.

<sup>105</sup> It is important to note that the theme Christ as a physician was already a symbol in Christianity for explaining the salvation achieved in Christ. For example, St. Athanasius (+ 373), in the treatise *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* wrote: "But once man was in existence, and things that were, not things that were not, demanded to be healed, it followed as a matter of course that the Healer and Saviour should align Himself with those things that existed already, in order to heal the existing evil. For that reason, therefore, He was made man, and used the body as His human instrument." St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, ET by C. S. Lewis, *On the Incarnation*, New York, 1993, 80.

<sup>106</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 334.

supporting, binding up, nourishing and restoring by His  
care.<sup>107</sup>

Mar Jacob used the word "healing" as a synonym for redemption and eternal life. In St. John's Gospel, Christ foretold that He must be lifted up as the serpent that Moses set on high in the wilderness, "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:15). Mar Jacob, in comparing Christ to the bronze serpent, explained redemption in terms of "healing."

He depicted Golgotha with the cross of the Son of God,  
showing how his body gives healing to bodies that have been  
wounded:  
all who have been bitten by the serpent who slew Adam,  
let each look on the cross, and it will heal him without  
medicines.<sup>108</sup>

The second aspect of the symbol "physician" deals with Christ's descent to Sheol which led to the resurrection of the dead. In the homily *On the Resurrection of Our Lord*, Mar Jacob says that Christ conquered "the region of death" and that He uprooted "Sheol."<sup>109</sup> Christ enters into the Sheol and annihilates the power of death. The presence of Christ among the dead functioned as an antidote for all those who were lying in Sheol, for they were called to life as He visited them.<sup>110</sup> Christ, by His entry into Sheol acted as

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<sup>107</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Redeemer*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 90.

<sup>108</sup> Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Moses' Face", ET by S. Brock, 78-79.

<sup>109</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Resurrection of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 307.

<sup>110</sup> St. Ephrem in Nisibean hymns, wrote about the failure of Death (personified) at the resurrection of the dead when Christ visited them in Sheol:

Let me run and close the gates of Sheol  
before that Dead One whose death has despoiled me.  
The Medicine of Life has entered Sheol  
and made its dead live.

Medicinal Herb to the dead Adam and released him. Here is Mar Jacob's employment of the imagery of the antidote to death when Christ had died as a man.

He was embodied, and he set himself before death;  
 All his life was hidden in him, while he was dead.  
 And when death had swallowed up the dead one who was full of  
 life [...]  
 As ordinary food, he ate him, when he ate him,  
 And life bubbled up from him and choked him when he  
 swallowed him.  
 When he ate him, he thought that he was a man,  
 And when he swallowed him, he knew he tasted the fact that he  
 was God.<sup>111</sup>

Another expression synonymously used in the context of redemption is Medicinal herb or Medicine of Life. In the homily *On the Friday of Passion* Mar Jacob introduced the theme of the Medicinal Herb. "A virgin has contracted the debt, the Son of a virgin will repay (it). The serpent has bitten a maiden, another maiden will give the Medicinal Herb for her cure."<sup>112</sup> Mar Jacob called Christ "the medicine" of the soul and of the body.<sup>113</sup> St. Ephrem in his commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron wrote that Christ gave a life-giving remedy from Himself: "But the Life-Giver

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Ephrem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers, Carmina Nisibena*, ed., E. Beck, CSCO 240, Syri. 102, 9, 1963; ET by R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 235.

<sup>111</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *HS* III, 615, ET by R. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, 117.

<sup>112</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Friday of Passion*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 281.

<sup>113</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *HS* IV, 717, 857; FT in B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l'anthropologie*, 232. Sony mentions that Mar Jacob had a deep knowledge of medicine. In order to invite the lazy who do not frequent the Church, he used the imagery of sickness and medicine. "Que Celui qui vient à l'église, n'y vienne pas sans discernement (pūrsono) comme des animaux privés de discernement. Personne ne visite la clinique du médecin par routine ('yodo) si la maladie ne l'oblige à aller le consulter." *HS* III 650; FT by B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l'anthropologie*, 232.



gave them a tower from himself which reached to the heights, and a tree whose fruit was a life-giving remedy.”<sup>114</sup> In Mar Jacob's thoughts, after death man has to make a dangerous journey towards God across a sea of fire,<sup>115</sup> and then one finds confidence in the body and blood of Christ that one has received.

### 2.3.3. The Theological Significance of the Symbol of the “Physician”

First of all, the symbol of the “Physician” sheds light on God's mercy towards man, with which He sent His Son for human redemption. It is not with some medical objects that He heals, but as we have seen above “his body gives healing to bodies that have been wounded.” We see in the Book of Wisdom that divine mercy is the basis of healing, “for thy mercy came to their help and healed them” (Wis 16:10).

Secondly, this symbol highlights the sacrament of the Eucharist. With His suffering and death Christ has redeemed man, as St. Peter has written, by His wounds we have been healed (1 Pet 2:24). Christ, the “medicinal herb” gives Himself up in the Eucharist.

Thirdly, this symbol has an eschatological significance. We have seen that the Eucharist is the “medicinal herb” that cures us of our sins. From what we have seen in the citation from the homily “On Heaven and Hell”, we can almost say that the body and blood that we have received will be the linking bridge between the earthly and heavenly life. For the Lord has said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 5:51).

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<sup>114</sup> Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, XIV § 2, ET by C. McCarthy, 214.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. M. D. Guinan, “Where are the dead? Purgatory and Immediate Retribution in James of Sarug”, in *OCA* 197 (1974), 542-543.

## 2.4. The Symbol of the “Tree of Life” (īlon hāyo ܐܝܠܢ ܚܝܐ)

The “Tree of Life” is another symbol which Mar Jacob used to express his views on the redemption achieved by Christ. The “tree of Life” is one of the titles of Christ.<sup>116</sup> When we deal with Mar Jacob’s treatment of this topic we will see how powerfully this symbol brings out man’s fall, and redemption from the fallen state.

### 2.4.1. The Biblical Background of the Symbol “Tree of Life”

The symbol of the “tree of life” has its origin in the second chapter of Genesis and has its last reference in the last chapter of Revelation. God made “the tree of life” grow in the midst of the garden (Gen 2:9). Adam was forbidden to eat its fruit (Gen 3:3). Once Adam and Eve had eaten of the tree of knowledge, God drove them out of the garden and placed the cherubim and a flaming sword, “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). Thus Adam and Eve, after having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, were banned from approaching the “tree of Life.” The first three references (Gen 2:9; 3:22 & 24) symbolically express man’s condition from which he needs to be redeemed. God gave man every tree as his food (Gen 1:29). He forbade man from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17). The focal point in the account of the tree of knowledge is bodily death (Gen 3:3). “To eat of the tree is tantamount to insolence and open rebellion against God.”<sup>117</sup> There is no explicit prohibition to eat the fruit of “the tree of life”, but man is simply ousted from the Garden of Eden “lest he put forth his hand and take also of “the tree of life”, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen 3:22-23).

It is advantageous to see the other biblical references pertaining to “the tree of life.” In the Book of Psalms, a righteous man is compared to a “tree planted by streams of water, that yields

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<sup>116</sup> For a good study of the title ‘Tree of Life’ in the works of St. Ephrem, Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 223.

<sup>117</sup> I. HUNT, “Tree of Knowledge”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIV, 269.

its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Ps 1:3; 92:12). The Prophet Jeremiah compares the man who trusts in the Lord to "a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer 17:7-8).

We read in the Book of Deuteronomy that capital punishment in Israel was carried out by hanging the criminal on a tree. This punishment was considered a curse as we read: "[...] his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day; for a hanged man is accursed by God" (Deut 21:22-23). When the apostles were questioned by the priests they proclaimed their faith thus: "The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Jesus was hung on the tree not as an accursed criminal, but as He had already made clear "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:15). Jesus also said that He was giving up His life of His own accord. "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father" (Jn 10:18). St. Peter referred to redemption in terms of Christ's salvific death on the cross: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24). Thus we understand that the Life-giver died on the tree in order to give us life.

The reference to Christ as the "tree of life" is closely connected to the prophecy of Isaiah who spoke about the coming of the Messiah "as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots" (Is 11:1). In the Book of Revelation Christ is presented as the offspring of David: "[...] I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star" (Rev 22:16).

The Book of the Revelation gives concrete references to the symbol "tree of life." "To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7). On either side of the river which St. John saw in a revelation, he saw



“the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him” (Rev 22:2-3). In this chapter we also read that man has access to the “tree of life”: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14). In the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, the reader is exhorted to keep the content of the Book intact. If one acts contrary to it, “God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev 22:19). In the Book of Revelation man received the promise of the fruit of “the tree of life” (Rev 2:7; 22:19), instead of its prohibition in the Book of Genesis (Gen 3:22-24).

#### 2.4.2. Mar Jacob’s Presentation of the Symbol of the “Tree of Life”

In Mar Jacob’s narration, the symbol of the “tree of Life” refers to two aspects: 1) humanity’s return to Paradise and 2) the Eucharist. Regarding humanity’s return, Mar Jacob in the *Prose Homily on the Nativity* writes that “on earth there began to be peace because the curse of the thorns has been rooted out by a crown (of the thorns). The hope has increased for humanity because the way to paradise has been opened in order that the redeemed may walk on it without the fear of the sword’s point.”<sup>118</sup> Mar Jacob in his homily “On the Parable of the Leaven” presents how Christ has brought the humanity to the lap of God the Father:

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<sup>118</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Prose Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 137. Aphrahat is the first Syriac author to speak about the removal of the lance that protected the Tree of Life and its fruits being given to the faithful. “Accordingly, by the coming of the offspring of the Blessed Mary the thorns are uprooted, the sweat wiped away, the fig tree cursed, the dust made salt, the curse nailed to the cross, the edge of the sword removed from before the tree of life and is given as food to the faithful, and Paradise promised to the blessed and to virgins and to the saints.” Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, 6:6, ET in *Nicene and Post – Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 13, 367.

Forasmuch [sic. For as much] as He willed to become the Son  
of Man from Mary,  
He made all the race of man to be sons of God.  
And behold, they are become brethren of the Son and heirs of  
the Father,  
For He Himself became a Brother to the servants of His  
Father.<sup>119</sup>

From the primeval story of Eden we know that Adam knew the way to “the tree of life”, but he could not approach it since it had been guarded. P. Yousif, in his article “La vierge Marie et l’Eucharistie chez saint ephrem de nisibe et dans la patristique syriaque anterieure” has explained that the “tree of life” is a prefigure of the Eucharist given to the children for nourishment. In as much as Mary is the mother of the Son of God, she gives salvation to the world. Mary gives us the Eucharist, for it is she that gave flesh to the Son of God. Mary makes us accessible to the “tree of life” that has been guarded by the sword.<sup>120</sup> The Syriac Fathers Aphrahat<sup>121</sup> and Ephrem<sup>122</sup> used different imageries to describe

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<sup>119</sup> Jacob of Serugh, “On that which Our Lord said in the Gospel, that on ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven’, which a Woman Took and Hid in Three Measures of Meal, till the Whole was Leavened”, ET from HTM, 57.

<sup>120</sup> Ainsi dans la mesure où Marie est la mère du Fils de Dieu, elle donne le salut au monde et sauve l’Arbre de vie; ainsi a-t-elle contribué, ou concouru, à la réalisation de l’Eucharistie; en effet celle-ci est vue par Aphrahat d’un même regard que l’Arbre de vie: en libérant l’arbre de vie de l’emprise de l’épée, Marie donne accès à la vie par l’Eucharistie. Ceci nous dit qu’Aphrahat voit la relation Marie-Eucharistie de façon plutôt voilée. P. Yousif, “La vierge Marie et l’Eucharistie chez saint Ephrem de Nisibie et dans la patristique syriaque antérieure”, 53.

<sup>121</sup> In the *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat explains that God’s mercy made man accessible to the “Tree of Life.” “It [the Tree] extended its branches and threw out tendrils, and spread its shoots beyond the fence, and in its kindness cast its fruits outside the limit by which it was surrounded to guard it.” Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, XXIII, PS II, 5, ET by R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 114.

<sup>122</sup> In *Carmina Nisibena* St. Ephrem describes man’s re-entry into the Tree of Life through the pierced side of Christ:

The lance of Phinehas filled me with fear,

man's re-entry to the "tree of Life." In the *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*, St. Ephrem says that Mary gives us the Eucharist:

The Church gave us the living bread  
for that unleavened bread which Egypt gave.  
Mary gave us the bread of refreshment  
for the bread of weariness which Eve gave.<sup>123</sup>

Mar Jacob in the homily *On the Virgin* explicitly refers to Mary as the agent who made the "tree of life" accessible to men.

Because of her, the Cherub had removed his lance that he  
might no longer guard  
the Tree of Life which offered itself to those who ate it.  
She gave us a sweet fruit, full of life,  
that we might eat from it and live forever with God.<sup>124</sup>

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That sword, with which he excluded the plague.  
The lance that guarded the Tree of Life  
makes me joyful yet sad, for it excluded Adam from Life  
yet excluded the plague from the people. But the lance which  
wounded Jesus,  
I [only] grieve for it; he was wounded, and I weep.  
From him came forth water and blood;  
Adam washed, came to life and returned to paradise.

Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena* 39:7 CSCO, 240, Syri. 102, 24-25, ET by R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 126.

<sup>123</sup> Ephrem, *Paschahymen*, 6:6-7, CSCO 248, Syri. 108, 13, ET by R. murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 145. S. Beggiani, when speaking about St. Ephrem's theology of symbol, explains that they explain the work of redemption. About the symbol of the "tree of life", he says: "Bodies die because they have sinned, and earth which is their mother has been cursed; but the body which is the Church is incorruptible, and the earth of which it is born is blessed, for this earth is Mary, blessed among women. Since Adam died because of sin, it was necessary that He remove sin and thereby also remove death; His eucharistic body replaces now the fruit of the tree, and the eucharistic table has become for us the garden of Eden." S. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to Maronite Tradition*, 33.

<sup>124</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39-40.



The Eucharist is Christ's body, given to the children of the Church for nourishment. In the homily "On the Reception of the Eucharist" Mar Jacob says that "His Body and His Blood He has set forth at the feast before them that sit at table, that *they may eat of Him, and live with Him without end.*"<sup>125</sup> After the fall of Adam, the Cherub was appointed to guard "the tree of life" in order not to allow man to eat of its fruit. But now, the Cherub is no more to guard the "tree of Life", and the fruit is given to man. Mar Jacob narrates this in the *Prose Homily on the Nativity*. "Today, the hand of the Cherub shall swerve from the spear of fire because the Tree of Life is not more to be guarded: for, behold its Fruit is put in the manger in order to be the nourishment for human beings, who by their own (will) had become similar to animals."<sup>126</sup> The reference to the "tree of life" in connection with the Eucharist is evident in the homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord* where we read that the "tree of life" gives His fruits to the mortals:

The Tree of life that stirred from the exalted place of Eden  
and behold, in the cave He scatters His fruits upon mortals.<sup>127</sup>

The Cherub guarded the "tree of life" with a flaming sword (Gen 3:24). But since the Son of God has redeemed man through His sacrifice and has given Himself in the Eucharist, man can approach the "tree of life." Through Christ's salvific acts the children of Adam have accessibility to paradise again and they would not be driven away from the "tree of life." In the homily *On the Ascension of Our Lord* Mar Jacob presents this in the following way:

He received in His side the blade of the lance of that guard;  
and dismissed it to set it aside so that it would (no longer)  
drive away those of the household of Adam.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Reception of the Holy Mysteries*, ET by R. H. Connolly, 285.

<sup>126</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Prose Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 133.

<sup>127</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 124.

In the homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord* Mar Jacob presents Christ, the new-born Child as the “Bread which came down from heaven” (Jn 6:41; 50). The fruit of the tree of life which has been forbidden to Adam, is now available to man for his nourishment. Here is Mar Jacob’s text:

The name of Ephrathah had been called ‘house of bread’  
because the Bread of life descended from the height and dwelt  
in its abode.  
Behold, Bethlehem, the new bread, for the hungry of the earth,  
the nourishment in the manger for the peoples who have gone  
astray like animals.  
The town of the bread which gave the Bread, corresponding to  
its name,  
for peoples and generations will eat from it, without it ever  
failing.<sup>129</sup>

The children of Adam have access to the fruit of the “tree of life”, which is the Holy Eucharist. Christ prepared the path of life for man to ascend to His Father<sup>130</sup> through different stages such as the Incarnation, living with men, suffering, death and resurrection. This would almost correspond to St. Athanasius’ reflection on the Incarnation that “He, indeed assumed humanity that we might become God.”<sup>131</sup>

### 2.4.3. The Theological significance of the Symbol of the “Tree of Life”

The “tree of life” is a symbol pointing to the fulfilment of all divine revelations in Jesus Christ; the prohibition to the “tree of life” marking man’s fall and accessibility to the fruit of “tree of life” (the Eucharist) marking man’s return. The dynamism of this symbol

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<sup>128</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 335.

<sup>129</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 117.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae quotquot supersunt I. Sarugensis*, ed., G. Olinder, Paris, 1937, 34.

<sup>131</sup> St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 93.

consists in understanding Eucharistic communion, "the fruit of the tree of life" as a pledge of man's accessibility to Paradise. It is relevant to quote here the prayer said by the celebrant when Eucharistic Communion is given to the newly baptized person in the Syro-Malankara Church. The prayer goes like this: "the fruit which Adam did not taste in the Paradise, is placed in your mouth today."<sup>132</sup>

This symbol has mariological importance as well, for it is Mary who has given Christ His Body and we receive His body in the Eucharist. In the divine office of the Syrian Church this theme is commemorated on Wednesday. "Blessed are you because yours is the heavenly bread that has come down from the heights. The fruit that the mortals have eaten; they have obtained life from him."<sup>133</sup>

In this part we have analysed four symbols concerning Christ, the Redeemer and we have seen that Christ's whole earthly life was for the salvation of humanity. It may be possible to sum up Mar Jacob's understanding on the redemption of the world in the following way. 1) The eternal Son of the Father became the mediator between man and God through the human nature that he received from Mary. 2) He gave Himself up for the redemption of humanity. In the homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* he states that if one were to "buy" Him, no one would have had enough to pay Him, so God gave Him to humanity "freely."<sup>134</sup> 3) Hence, the salvific death on the cross was the definitive moment of redemption. 4) In His descent to Sheol, He brought life to the departed ones. 5) In His ascent to heaven He "took us up with Him." In the following part we will look at Mary's role in the redemption.

<sup>132</sup> *Ethātham Kthōbo Hōno B<sup>e</sup>metbeltho*, ed., A. Konatt, Pampakuda, 1972, 60.

<sup>133</sup> *Zlūtho d'yawmōtho šhīme d'šab<sup>e</sup>tho*, Antioch, 1958, 206.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, ET in the *Appendix of this book*, i-ii.



### 3. The Redemption: God's Plan and His Action and Mary's Role in It

The Incarnation is God's plan and His action. God's promise of salvation is visible throughout the Old Testament, of which the first can be seen in Genesis 3:15 when God tells the serpent that "he", the seed of the woman "shall bruise your head." In the homily *On the Nativity of Our Lord* Mar Jacob described how the "Lord of heaven" who dwelt in "a hollow cave" sought the serpent in the caves and in the caverns, and "seized it at the Nativity and crushed it."<sup>135</sup>

Through the vicissitudes of Israel, God had been preparing a people for the coming of Christ. Israel's promise of obedience in response to divine elections in the Old Testament had not been effective, for they had not been always faithful to God. In the words of V. Lossky, it was Mary who brought a difference in this relationship with God:

All the sacred tradition of the Jews is a history of the slow and laborious journey of fallen humanity towards the "fullness of time," when the angel was to be sent to announce to the chosen Virgin the Incarnation of God and to hear from her lips human consent, so that the divine plan of salvation could be accomplished. Thus, according to St. John Damascus, "The name of the Mother of God contains all the history of the divine economy in this world."<sup>136</sup>

#### 3.1. Redemption through Incarnation

In the Old Testament the accomplishment of God's purpose is compared to the fruitfulness that the rain and snow bring to the earth; "[...] so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is 55:10-11).

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<sup>135</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 118.

<sup>136</sup> V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, eds., J. H. Erickson & T. E. Bird, New York, 1985, 202.

The Word became flesh in view of human redemption. Just as in the call of Abraham, so too when God sends forth His Son for the salvation of man, it is God who takes the initiative. God became man in order to accomplish the divine activity of salvation in humanity. At the moment of the Annunciation, Mary stood before God representing the whole people of Israel. She made a radical choice when God's messenger spoke with her. In order that the Word could become flesh, Mary's co-operation was necessary. Mar Jacob in his metric homilies, presented the vital role played by Mary at the moment of Annunciation. As Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* clearly states, the Annunciation is "the point of departure from which her whole "journey towards God" begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith."<sup>137</sup>

### 3.2. Mary's Response and Co-operation with the Plan of God

As S. Brock remarks, the Syriac literature takes the view that Mary's role there at the Annunciation was a crucial starting point for the events of the Incarnation and that without Mary, the Incarnation would not have taken place.<sup>138</sup> "The story of Mary recounts her continuous unrelenting response to God begun in the announcement of Christ's Incarnation."<sup>139</sup> When God invited Mary to co-operate in the Incarnation of the Word, He expected a total surrender on her part, just as He did from Abraham when he was chosen to be the Father of the chosen people. Mary's voluntary co-operation in the Incarnation was an exercise of her freedom. After proposing to Mary, God's plan of salvation, the archangel waited for her response, "let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). So, her honour was not only due to God's choice of her to be the Mother of His Son, but because she responded with faith saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." Mary responded to God in a relational way; which is to say that she worked with God.<sup>140</sup> In

<sup>137</sup> John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 14, Boston, 1987, 20.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. S. Brock, "Mary in Syriac Tradition", in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed., A. Stacpoole, 1982, 183.

<sup>139</sup> R. N. Beshara, *Mary Ship of Treasures*, 96.

<sup>140</sup> St. Paul views the works of the apostles also as co-working with God: "We are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor 3:9).



Luke 11:27-28, when the woman spoke aloud from the crowd “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!”, Jesus corrected her saying “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” The woman’s words could not mean anything more than the physical aspect of Christ’s birth, but He wanted to draw their attention to Mary’s inner faith without which the Incarnation would have been impossible. Christ here affirms that Mary is blessed, since she believed the Word of God at the Annunciation and kept it. Mary’s attentiveness to God’s word is emphasized by the evangelist Luke in two other passages. 1) After the shepherds had adored the Child Jesus, we read that “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). 2) Luke made the same comment after narrating the discovery of Jesus who was listening to the teachers and asking questions in the temple: “his mother kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51).

In the Incarnation Mary bore Christ and became the dwelling place of God. Mary, in her encounter with the angel made an act of faith like that of Abraham who believed and whose faith was “reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:22). Zachariah, who remained sceptical after his vision in the temple, represents the attitude of the covenant partners of the Old Testament “who blinded their eyes and hardened their heart” (Is 6:9-10; Jn 12:40). Mary entered into God’s plan by the total offering of herself, by obedience and trust in the Word of God. Unlike Zachariah, Mary accepted the divine plan and put her trust in God’s promise. Like Abraham who inaugurated the Old Covenant, Mary paved the way for the New Covenant. Israel had been formed and chosen because of Abraham’s act of faith. Mary’s act of faith became the source of blessing for the “New Israel”, because therewith she prepared herself for the Incarnation that led to the redemption. In the New Testament, Mary is the “blessing” for the children of the “New Israel”, and Elizabeth affirmed it saying that “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Lk 1:45). God told Abraham, “the father of many nations” (Rom 4:18) that he “will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). In the new alliance, Mary “is a blessing.” She can be called “the mother of the believers” for she, by her example sets the Church in the way of faith, obedience and trust in God.



### 3.3. The Paschal Mystery –Mary at the Foot of the Cross

Mary occupied the centre of Christ's feelings as He endured the agony of the Cross and died. Just as Mary shared intimately in the mystery of Incarnation, so also she shared in the mystery of Christ's redeeming death, which Mar Jacob presents in the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*:

Your mother endured many sufferings for your sake;  
every grief encompassed her at your Crucifixion.  
How much sighing and sorrowful tears did her eyes shed,  
when they enshrouded You and brought You to rest within the  
tomb.<sup>141</sup>

This passage explains the culminating moment of Mary's co-operation with the Redeemer in the work of redemption. The text that we have cited above is based on the passion narrative and it reveals how intimately she had been united to the Redeemer.<sup>142</sup> Mary's presence at the foot of the Cross and the suffering that she endured could be depicted as Mary's martyrdom of the soul.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 90.

<sup>142</sup> Pope John Paul II has a reflection on Mary's participation in the sufferings of Christ: "Mary intimately lived her Son's paschal mystery: in a certain sense she died as a mother in the death of the Son and was opened to the "resurrection" with a new motherhood for the Church (cf. Jn 19:25-27). There, on Calvary, Mary experienced the night of faith, like that of Abraham on Mount Moriah, and after the enlightenment of Pentecost she continued on her pilgrimage of faith until the Assumption, when the Son welcomed her into eternal bliss." John Paul II, "Mary leads us on a Pilgrimage of Faith", in *OR*, 28 March 2001, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Concerning Mary's participation in the death of Christ M. Jugie says it was a martyrdom of Mary also: "The presence of Mary in the principal act of our redemption i.e., at the death of Christ on the cross was not fortuitous. It was appropriate that the new Eve should be near the side of the new Adam, at this solemn moment and the martyrdom of her compassion be united to the martyrdom of Jesus' passion for our salvation. It was not just at this last act of the divine drama that the mother is associated to the Son. It is during the whole life of this One [the Son] that the Virgin was intimately united to Jesus through the most ardent love and

### 3.4. The Resurrection and Mary

There is no reference to Mary's presence in the resurrection account of the Gospels.<sup>144</sup> But the Syrian Fathers, St. Ephrem and Mar Jacob believed that the Blessed Virgin Mother was standing by the tomb of Christ. R. H. Connolly who has examined the homilies of Mar Jacob says that Mary (not Magdalene) arrived at the tomb and announced Christ's resurrection to Peter and John. Concerning our Lord's apparition to Mary, Mar Jacob wrote that 'In *the Garden of Joseph*, He shewed Himself to the Blessed (woman)', and R. H. Connolly in synthesizing Mar Jacob's view opines that "no doubt the B.V.M. is meant."<sup>145</sup> So, according to Mar Jacob Mary is the testimony of the resurrection. R. Murray remarks that St. Ephrem, in bringing his doctrine concerning Mary as the type of the Church does not regard that it was Magdalene but the Virgin to whom Christ appeared in the garden.<sup>146</sup> This 'fusion' is not a peculiarity of Ephrem but is found in other Syriac witnesses.<sup>147</sup> For example in the homilies for Holy Week we read:

Again, Mary is like the Church,  
the Virgin, who has borne the first-fruits by the Gospel.

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as a consequence had to enter fully into his intention to accomplish that what He Himself called His work and that of the Father." M. Jugie, *La mort e l'assomption de la sainte vierge étude historico-doctrinale*, Città del Vaticano, 1944, 544.

<sup>144</sup> In St. Ephrem, there is a fusion of two Maries, Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary in his description of the Resurrection. In his commentary on Jn 20:17: "Do not touch me", St. Ephrem writes: "Why, therefore, did he prevent Mary from touching him? Perhaps it was because he had confided her to John in his place, *Woman, behold your son*. However, just as the first sign had not been without her, so too it was fitting that the first fruits [of his emergence] from Sheol should not be [without her]. Thus, although she did not touch him, she was comforted." Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, XXI, 27, ET by C. McCarthy, 331.

<sup>145</sup> R. H. Connolly, "Jacob of Serug and the Diatessaron", 588; Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *HS I*, 609.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 144.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 146.



In the place of the Church, Mary saw him.  
 Blessed be he who gladdened the Church and Mary!  
 Let us call the Church itself 'Mary',  
 for it befits her to have two names.  
 For to Simon, the Foundation,  
 Mary was the first to run,  
 and like the Church, brought him the good news  
 and told him what she had seen  
 that Our Lord had risen and was raised up.  
 Fittingly did she come to Simon  
 and bring him the good news that the Son was risen,  
 For he was the Rock and Foundation  
 of the Church of the gentiles, the elect.<sup>148</sup>

It is relevant to note here that in his Mariological catechesis, Pope John Paul II expresses his conviction that the Risen Lord appeared to His Mother.<sup>149</sup> The Pope considers Mary; the Mother of Christ as the testimony of the Resurrection. The Pope sees Mary's joy at the resurrection as the extension of the joy with which the angel addressed her at the Annunciation, thus she becomes the "cause of joy" for the whole humanity.<sup>150</sup> We have mentioned here the views of Pope John Paul II only to show that contemporary theologians share the views of the fourth and fifth century Syrian Fathers.

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<sup>148</sup> I. S. Iamy, *Ephraemi Syri Hymni et Sermones*, 4 Vols. Mecheln, 1882-1902, Syriac Text with Latin Translation, 531-532; ET by R. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers", *ECR* 3 (1974), 383-384.

<sup>149</sup> The original text is: "Ad una di loro, Maria Maddalena, infatti, il Risorto affida il messaggio da trasmettere agli Apostoli (cfr Gv 20, 17-18). Anche questo elemento consente forse di pensare a Gesù che si mostra prima a sua Madre, Colei che è rimasta la più fedele e nelle prova ha conservato integra la fede." John Paul II, *La catechesi Mariana di Giovanni Paolo II*, Città del Vaticano, 1998, 176.

<sup>150</sup> The original text is: "Ricorda così alla gioia di Maria per la risurrezione di Gesù, prolungando nel tempo il «rallegrati» rivolte dall'Angelo nell'annuncio, perché divenisse «causa di gioia» per l'intera umanità." John Paul II, *La catechesi Mariana di Giovanni Paolo II*, 177.



### 3.5. Pentecost and Mary

At the time of the ascension, Christ told the disciples to stay in the city until they “are clothed with the power from on high” (Lk 24:49). As per the instructions of the Risen Lord, the disciples “devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14).<sup>151</sup> It is significant that Mary was among the praying community in the upper room at the time of Pentecost. Mary is a sign and anticipation of humanity that hopes to reach its fullness through resurrection from the dead.

## 4. Mary’s Participation in Our Redemption

Mary’s participation in human salvation consisted in her unique relation to the Redeemer. Mary was Christ’s virgin mother. Christ was the Son of God who became man. Christ, the God-man, is the Redeemer of humanity. Mar Jacob deals with Mary’s unique co-operation both at the nativity of the Redeemer and at the time of the Redeemer’s sacrificial death. Mary’s role at the nativity of the Redeemer was not that of a passive bystander but a co-worker.

### 4.1. Christ in Heaven: the Perennial Source of Our Redemption

We have already seen that Christ who became man, after fulfilling the work of redemption ascended to heaven, and this is the perennial source of our salvation. The Apostles’ preaching was based on the resurrection of our Lord, for example St. Paul preached that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Based on the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Mar Jacob presented Mary as the first one to enjoy the joy of heaven. There is a parallelism between the ascension of Our Lord and of Mary’s glorious entry into heaven. To mark her entry into heaven Mar Jacob quoted Psalm 24:7 in his homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*. He also quotes this psalmic verse at the time of Christ’s Ascension also.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Ascension of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollamparampil, 350. In the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, there is a

## 4.2. Mary as Redeemed

Mary, like every human being was in need of salvation. Mary called God "my Saviour" in the *Magnificat*: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:46-47). The early Christian community had proclaimed Christ as the Saviour and mediator between man and God. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time" (I Tim 2:5). Thus Christ gave His life as a ransom for all human beings including Mary. We have no explicit reference in Mar Jacob's writings to show that Mary was redeemed by Christ.<sup>152</sup> But in his homily *On the Virgin* he speaks about the need of Mary's purification by the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit came to Mary,  
to let loose from her the former sentence of Eve and Adam.  
He sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among  
women;  
He freed her from that curse of sufferings on account of Eve,  
her mother.  
She was summoned that she might be the Mother of the Son of  
God;  
the Holy Spirit had sanctified her and so dwelt within her.  
The Spirit freed her from that debt that she might be beyond  
transgression when He solemnly dwelt in her.

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description of Christ's entry into Sheol with a quotation from Ps 24:7. And setting out to Paradise, He took hold of Adam by hand and delivered him. Cf. *Gospel of Nicodemus: Memorials of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Done in the Time of Pontius Pilate*, ET *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, 437.

<sup>152</sup> It is relevant to mention St. Ephrem here, who in the *Hymns on the Nativity* described that Mary has been redeemed by Christ.

For I am [your] sister from the House of David,  
who is a second father. Again, I am mother  
because of Your conception, and bride am I  
because of your chastity. Handmaiden and daughter  
of blood and water [am I] whom You redeemed and baptized.  
Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 16:10, ET by K. Mcvey, 150.

He purified the Mother by the Holy Spirit while dwelling in her,  
that He might take from her a pure body without sin.<sup>153</sup>

From this passage we understand that Mar Jacob considered Mary as any other human being who needed purification and sanctification. In clarifying this point S. Brock wrote:

I think Jacob's understanding is that, though Mary was the purest and humblest woman imaginable, yet she still needed to be re clothed with the robe of glory that Adam and Eve lost at the Fall, and this is why (M. Hansbury, 35-36) he specifically says that at the Annunciation the Spirit made her like Eve before the Fall – surely indicates that before the Annunciation she was not yet like pre-Fall Eve, however pure she was.<sup>154</sup>

From this we sum up that there is no explicit reference to Mary being redeemed by Christ. She, the most pure and humble woman stands among the rest of humanity and was sanctified by the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation. Mary also received Christ's blessings as He dwelt in her and as she participated in His passion.

### 4.3. Mary's Contribution to the Redemption

Mary's co-operation in the human redemption involved everything that she did from the moment of the Annunciation till the Crucifixion of her Son. However, there are two important moments that need to be mentioned: 1) Her participation in the Incarnation and 2) her share in the redeeming death of Christ, her Son.<sup>155</sup> God's

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<sup>153</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 34-35.

<sup>154</sup> In clarifying this point, S. Brock wrote to the author in a personal letter on 28.3.2001.

<sup>155</sup> C.O. Vollert has a good reflection concerning Mary's co-operation in the redemption: "If Mary is mother of all the living, she is associated with her Son in His redemptive work. The consent that she freely gave at the Annunciation to be the mother of Christ was enlivened anew at the Crucifixion. By cooperating in the redeeming sacrifice, she is new Eve in the most perfect sense, source of men's life, mother of the Body as she is mother of the head." C. O. Vollert, "Mary and the Church", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, 1966, 355.



plan of salvation reached its culmination in the mystery of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. He redeemed the world in the humanity that He received from Mary.<sup>156</sup> Mary's share in the reconciliation and sanctification of the humanity is a corollary to her divine maternity. Concerning her co-operation in the miraculous nativity of Christ S. Brock writes:

The descent and miraculous birth of God into the world requires the co-operation of an individual human being with the Holy Spirit; only then can the miraculous birth of the sacraments from Christ's side effect the ascent of man to God. Mary's role is thus essentially to be seen as complementary to that of the Church and the sacraments in the process of the Divine Economy.<sup>157</sup>

The turning point in human salvation was the moment of the Annunciation.<sup>158</sup> Mary's courageous response paves the way for the Redeemer's nativity according to the flesh that led to the

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<sup>156</sup> St. Ephrem, in the *Hymn on the Crucifixion* referred to the humanity of Christ that He had received from Mary. Here in the hymn, the Upper Room is personified:

Blessed is thy dwelling, in which was broken  
that Bread from the blessed sheaf!  
In thee was pressed  
the Cluster [that came] from Mary,  
the Chalice of salvation.

Ephrem, *Paschahymnen*, 3:9, CSCO 248 Syri. 108, 51-52, ET by R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 120.

<sup>157</sup> S. Brock, "The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ", in *Sobornost* 7:6 (1978), 470.

<sup>158</sup> Ephrem in his Commentary on Diatessaron says that Eve's sin was overcome by Mary at the Annunciation, and that the complete acquittal of humanity from sin took place at Christ's death on the Cross: "Death had entered through Eve's ear; consequently life entered through Mary's ear. It was through the wood that humanity had contracted debts; consequently when Our Lord came, it was through the wood that he acquitted them." EPRHEM, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, XX, § 32, ET by C. McCarthy, 311.

redemption of humanity. It is relevant to cite a passage from the homily *On the Virgin* which tells us about her role in the human salvation:

Because of her, the way to Eden which had been blocked was  
opened;  
the serpent fled and men passed along it to God.  
Because of her, *the Cherub had removed his lance* that he  
might no longer guard  
the Tree of Life which offered itself to those who ate it.<sup>159</sup>

According to Mar Jacob at the time of the Annunciation the dwellers of heaven and earth were reconciled and the conflict between the Lord and Adam was abolished. This is how he presents it:

That moment was full of wonder when Mary was standing,  
conversing in argument with Gabriel.  
One humble daughter of poor folk and one angel  
met each other and spoke of a wonderful tale.  
A pure virgin and a fiery Watcher spoke with wonder:  
a discourse which reconciled dwellers of earth and heaven.  
One woman and the prince of all the hosts  
had made an agreement for the reconciliation of the whole  
world.  
The two had sat between heavenly beings and earthly ones;  
they spoke, attended to and made peace for those who were  
wroth.  
Maiden and Watcher met each other and conversed in  
argument on the matter  
until they abolished the conflict between the Lord and Adam.  
That great strife which occurred amidst the trees  
came up for discussion, and it all came to an end; there was  
peace.  
An earthly being and a heavenly one spoke with love;  
the struggle between the two sides ceased, and they were at  
peace.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39-40. [My italics].

<sup>160</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 29.

Thus Mary's co-operation with the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of the Word was the decisive moment of our redemption.

Christ's sacrificial death is the second important moment that marks Mary's role in the redemption. Mar Jacob did not deal with all the Gospel references pertaining to Mary in his mariological homilies, he did not even deal with her presence at the miracle in Cana. But in the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, he purposefully referred to Mary at the foot of the Cross which makes clear that she continued to be with the Redeemer at the moment of His sacrificial death. He described how much Mary suffered at the time of His crucifixion. The itinerary of faith that Mary had begun at the Annunciation, continued all during her life and reached its culmination at the foot of the Cross. This accentuates her participation in the human redemption.<sup>161</sup>

#### 4.4. Mary's Death and Burial

Mar Jacob has depicted Mary's death, not as a bitter experience, but as the moment of glory and praise because it is related to the death and resurrection of the Son of God. There is no biblical reference concerning Mary's death and burial.<sup>162</sup> So we presume that Mar Jacob's understanding about Mary's death and burial is based on the apocryphal writings and the oral tradition of the time. The homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary* is recorded to have been delivered on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August (the year is not mentioned) in the Church of Mar Kuriakose,<sup>163</sup> which means that by

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<sup>161</sup> Mar Jacob, who convincingly expressed Mary's role in the redemption would not favour any new dogmatic formulations, such as Co-redemptrix, although he acknowledged her role in the redemption. Terms such as Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix are anachronisms when applied to Mar Jacob.

<sup>162</sup> The Bible is silent about the Holy Virgin Mary concerning her death, the last reference about Mary being that of the Acts of the Apostles (1:14). Epiphanius wrote in 374 that "We do not know if she died and if she was buried." Cf. G. I. Söll, "Mary Mother of Jesus", in *EEC*, 538. Therefore, we can conclude that even in the fourth century, the Christian community did not have a clear concept of Mary's death.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *SMS*, 709.



then the Syrian Church had already begun to commemorate Mary's Assumption on that day. In the above mentioned homily, Mar Jacob explains that she had experienced death in the same way as all the patriarchs, prophets and the chosen ones. He presents her death as tasting the cup of her Son.

Unto the Mother of this Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
death came that she might taste his cup.<sup>164</sup>

Mar Jacob who used biblical symbols and poetic language, refers here to the unique blessing that Mary enjoys in Christ's glory. The evangelist Mark speaks of the appeal of the sons of Zebedee who desired to sit at the right hand and left hand of Christ in His glory. Christ challenged them saying: "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mk 10:38). When these disciples answered Him that "we are able", he told them that "to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mk 10:40). When Mar Jacob affirmed that death came to Mary so that she might taste "his cup", he in his poetic style depicted the glory that Mary enjoys in heaven.

Mar Jacob speaks of the arrival of the apostles in Jerusalem near the death bed of Mary from wherever they had been, which is reminiscent of the apocryphal narratives.<sup>165</sup> The gathering of the departed patriarchs and the apostles around the death bed of Mary is narrated with the same solemnity as at the time of Christ's descent to Sheol. R. N. Beshara comments upon their arrival describing it as a farewell to Mary as she departs to enjoy her heavenly glory: "the Old and the New Israel leave their tombs to escort the Lady of light to her place of honour. Yes, they come from the ends of the earth to bid farewell to Mary, the earthly sojourner sealed as "first

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<sup>164</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET. by M. HANSBURY, 93.

<sup>165</sup> In the apocryphal of John the Theologian there is mention of Elizabeth, Anna, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David and all the saints who adore the holy relics of the mother of God. *The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary*, ET Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VIII, 591.

heir of Christ's Resurrection."<sup>166</sup> This narrative is the expression of Christ's solidarity with humanity. Mar Jacob had a special interest in remembering the deaths of the Patriarchs and the "just ones" (*zādīqe*) of the Old Testament. Daniel was "a man most pleasing"<sup>167</sup> (Dan 9:23). "Moses, the prophet, was buried by God"<sup>168</sup> (Deut 34:6). Mary's death and burial are depicted as a glorious and life-giving event for the whole of creation. He describes Mary as placing a glorious crown on David from whom she came forth. Mar Jacob, using poetic language, described Mary's power to grant new life: "one young maiden has called all mankind to life."<sup>169</sup>

Mar Jacob speaks about the burial of her "virginal body in the grave."<sup>170</sup> Different editions give different descriptions concerning the exact place where Mary was buried. For example, in the Book of John the Theologian, we read that "the apostles carried the couch, and laid down her precious and holy body in Gethsemane in a new tomb."<sup>171</sup> The edition attributed to Joseph of Arimathaea speaks about the funeral procession of the holy body from Mount Sion to the Valley of Josaphat,<sup>172</sup> and a Latin form entitled, "The Passing of Mary", says that the apostles "carried the holy body down from

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<sup>166</sup> R. N. Beshara, *Mary Ship of Treasures*, 98.

<sup>167</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 91.

<sup>168</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 94.

<sup>169</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 97.

<sup>170</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 96.

<sup>171</sup> *The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary*, ET Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VIII, 591. The translator says that the titles of this work vary depending on the manuscripts used, for in two manuscripts, James the Lord's brother is said to be the author and in one, John Archbishop of Thessalonica.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. B. Bagatti, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsamane*, ET by L. Sciberras, Jerusalem, 1975, 12.



Mount Zion to the valley of Jehoshaphat.”<sup>173</sup> The Syriac apocryphal locates Mount Olives as the burial place of Mary’s body.<sup>174</sup> According to Mar Jacob it is on the *mountain of Galilee*, that she “was buried by the Watchers and also by the angels, together with God.”<sup>175</sup> B. Bagatti, who gives some literary source concerning the chamber-tomb of Mary, mentions Mar Jacob in the first place speaking about the “cavern” comparing the burial of the Blessed Virgin with that of Jesus.<sup>176</sup> Mar Jacob, therefore, was considered to be a credible source concerning the matter.

Mar Jacob has a beautiful presentation of the glorification of Mary when he describes her burial. He mentions the presence of past generations witnessing Mary’s death and assisting at her burial. He enumerates their names three times, beginning with Adam; on the third occasion, underlying that they are present not to be passive witnesses, but to rejoice at her entrance into the heavenly kingdom and to witness her crowning. Judah rejoices because “the daughter who has given life”, went forth from his loins. Joseph and Moses rejoice “for one young maiden has called all mankind to life.”<sup>177</sup> A few lines later we see the same theme expressed in a different way: “the daughter of Judah dropped dew on their bones.” What does this description refer to? It refers to the fact that the hopes and aspirations of the humanity were fulfilled in Mary. Jesus says:

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<sup>173</sup> *The Passing of Mary: First Latin Form Concerning the Passing of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ET in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII, 593.

<sup>174</sup> Here is the narration of the Syriac Apocrypha. The Holy Spirit commanded the disciples to “take up the Lady Mary this morning and go forth from Jerusalem on the road that goes out to the head of the valley on this side of the Mount of Olives lo! where there are caves, a large outer cave, another within it, and a small inner cave, and a raised bench of clay on the east side. Go in and place the Blessed one on that bench, and minister about her until I shall speak to you.” A. S. Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, XI, London, 1902, 50-51, ET by B. Bagatti, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsamane*, 13.

<sup>175</sup> Jacob of Serugh *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 94.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. B. Bagatti, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsamane*, 32.

<sup>177</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 97.



“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). The narration of the joy of the patriarchs and the apostles explains that the hope of Abraham was finally realized in Mary. The reference to the joy of the patriarchs and the shedding off of the dews are metaphoric expressions which Mar Jacob used to tell us that the hope and aspirations of every believer is realized in Mary. This narration is poetic, biblical and Judeo-Christian in thinking.

#### 4.5. Mary Now in Heaven

The resurrection and ascension of our Lord is the foundation of the conception of Mary's glorious entrance into heaven.<sup>178</sup> There is no biblical evidence concerning the assumption of Mary just as there is no biblical reference to her death. When we go through the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, we understand Mar Jacob's conviction that the Virgin who, never for a moment was under the slightest shadow of sin and who “believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord”, was taken to heaven.<sup>179</sup> The Bible being reticent about the assumption, the apocryphal writings were the source for him.<sup>180</sup> Mar Jacob narrates Mary's assumption like this:

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<sup>178</sup> As G. I. Söll notes “Mary's empty tomb at Jerusalem and the absence of relics, were interpreted as evidence of her bodily assumption.” In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Theotecnos of Livias near Jericho (+ c.600) and Modestus of Jerusalem (+ c.630) tried to clarify the new mystery of Mary's elevation to heaven by relating it to the dogma of the immaculate conception and ushered in the axiom “*assumpta quia immaculata*.” Cf. G. I. Söll, “Mary Mother of Jesus”, 538.

<sup>179</sup> It is good to remember here T. Spidlik's reflection on the event of Mary's departure from this world. He notes that Mary does not ascend to heaven, rather on the contrary, Christ descends to the earth and takes her to heaven. “Il passaggio da questa vita all'altra si effettua quindi per mezzo di Cristo, della sua presenza. Per sua Madre, l'ultima venuta di Cristo è prepartecipata, dato che lei è l'“*éschaton*”, l'ultima perfezione del creato.” T. Spidlik & M. I. Rupnik, *Narrativa dell'immagine*, Roma, 1996, 89.

<sup>180</sup> It is at a later period that the theme of Mary's assumption into heaven has come into the preaching of the Fathers. For example, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century Germanum of Constantinople (+733), Andrew of Crete (+740) and John

The heavenly company performed their “Holy, Holy, Holy,”  
unto the glorious soul of this Mother of the Son of God.  
Fiery seraphim surrounded the soul of the departed  
and raised the loud sound of their joyful shouts.<sup>181</sup>

Here he does not use the expression “bodily assumption”, but describes her glorious entry into heaven.<sup>182</sup> Just as at the ascension of Christ, so also when speaking about Mary’s entry into heaven, Mar Jacob puts Psalm 24:7 in the mouth of the angels, standing at the doors of heaven.

They shouted and said: “Lift up, O gates, all your heads,  
because the Mother of the King seeks to enter the bridal  
chamber of light.”<sup>183</sup>

When Mary entered into heavenly glory, she became a sign to the poor and the humble that they also will attain in fullness what Christ promised in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-10). Christians hope for the resurrection of the dead as St. Paul preached: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruit, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:22-23). This hope was realized in Mary as she entered into heavenly glory. Mary praised the Lord in the *Magnificat* for having “exalted those of low degree” (Lk 1:52); and

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Damascene (+749) spoke about the Mary’s assumption and her heavenly mediation. Cf. G. I. SÖLL, “Mary Mother of Jesus”, 538.

<sup>181</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 98.

<sup>182</sup> When we analyse the Syriac word *napša* ܢܦܫܐ, the word for the soul, we understand that it signifies more than soul, for in Syriac this word has different meanings such as breath of life, a soul, living person and oneself. (Cf. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 346-347. B. P. Sony analyses the meaning of soul (*napšâ*) in the study on Mar Jacob’s understanding of creation and anthropology. B. P. Sony, *La doctrine de Jacques de Saroug sur la création et l’anthropologie*, 238). Perhaps this term has a greater significance than the soul. So, *napšâ* could refer to Mary herself, not just to the soul. We suggest this because Mar Jacob does not use the word *napšâ* in the following passages, rather he uses expressions such as “Mother of the King” and “Mother of Mercy.”

<sup>183</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 98.



this exaltation became a reality in the fullest sense at her glorious entry, which is a prefigure of our future glory.<sup>184</sup> Mary who experienced death, has now become one who shares in her Son's role as a giver of new life.

#### 4.6. Mary and the Church

Mary is the mother of Christ. The Church is Christ's mystical body. And because of this relationship, Mary is the mother of the Church. As Mary expressed her readiness to co-operate with God at the Annunciation, she absorbed in herself the whole people of Israel, and the whole mystery of the Church is symbolised in her. Mary's communion with her crucified Son made her at once the mother of the whole of redeemed humanity. Christ, at the moment of His death, gave Mary as mother to the disciple: "Behold your mother" (Jn 19:27). She is the mother of the Church in the sense that she is able to co-operate in the work of the Church built up by Christ. She realized her maternal role in the Church and she was present among the apostles waiting to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

The first important aspect in Mary's relationship with the Church according to Mar Jacob, is that she imparts the Holy Spirit to others. He refers to the scene of the visitation and interprets the leaping of the baby in Elizabeth's womb as effected by Mary's greetings.

By the mouth of Mary, her Son stretched forth the Spirit to his  
envoy,

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<sup>184</sup> It is relevant to quote J. Saward who sees Mary's assumption as an anticipation of our own resurrection. "Mary's resurrection is a type, an anticipation, of that ingathering. The resurrection of Jesus is not simply typological but effective, it has a causal and not simply iconic relation to the general resurrection. It does not simply prefigure the reassembly of all men but actually sets it in motion. Now our Lady *receives* resurrection as we all shall through the power of God; the difference in her case being only its anticipation, its role as sign and type." J. Saward, "The Assumption of Our Lady", in *Sobornost* 7:6 (1978), 350-351.



from the womb to womb; and he received it while he was in  
his mother.

With Mary's voice the Holy Spirit was sent out  
unto the barren one, and she was filled with great strength.<sup>185</sup>

Therefore, according to Mar Jacob Mary had a unique role in mediating the Spirit from her Son to others. Mary's mediation for humanity was also evident in the miracle at Cana. When Mary came to know about the scarcity of wine she informed her Son, "they have no wine" (Jn 2:3). And she said to the servants: "do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). The servants filled the jars with water and Jesus changed it into wine. Mary's intervention at Cana points to her powerful mediation.

The second aspect in Mary's relationship with the Church is that she is the spokesperson of the Church. After examining Mary's encounter with the angel at the time of Annunciation, Mar Jacob calls her "the mouth of the Church."

The beauty of the matter which appeared openly is because of  
her;  
she was the reason that it was explained to us by the angel.  
By that question, the wise one became the *mouth of the*  
*Church*;  
she learned that interpretation for all Creation.<sup>186</sup>

Mary is the "mouth of the Church", for she demanded an explanation from the angel. And having understood that he was bringing the message of salvation for all mankind, she consented to it and brought forth the Redeemer.

#### 4.7. Mary and the Individual Christian

Mary's communion with her crucified Son made her at once the mother of the redeemed humanity. Mary's spiritual motherhood is based on her presence at the foot of the cross as Jesus entrusted His mother to John saying, "Woman, behold, your son!" and John to

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<sup>185</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 78.

<sup>186</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 38.

His mother "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19: 26-27). John represents all the children of God who believe in Him. R. Murray, in studying the Syriac Fathers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, delineates the relationship between Mary and individual Christians in the following way: "Mary has a twofold relationship to the Church. She is *in* it, the first of the redeemed; but also, since the Church is Christ's body, Mary, the mother of Christ's individual body, is mystically mother of all Christ's members in the mystical Body; this is the meaning which the Fathers found in 'Behold thy Mother.'"<sup>187</sup> She is mother to every believer. When we connect John 1:12-13 and Revelation 12:5-17 we get the impression that Mary is the Mother of Christ and of the Church (the members of Christ's body) (Eph 5: 23). In interpreting these two passages D. M. Crossan writes:

In both these passages [Apoc 12 and Jn 1:12-13] St. John is speaking directly of the birth of the Whole Christ, the physical birth of the Head and the spiritual birth of the members. In the Apocalypse St. John depicts the Whole Christ as «a son, a male» (12,5) who includes both «the child» (12,6) who is Christ, and «the rest of her offspring» (12,17) which are the Christians. This Whole Christ is born of Mary who is clothed with God Himself (v.1a) to enable her to perform her gigantic task despite her frail humanity (Luke 1, 35).<sup>188</sup>

The believers are part of Christ's body, and Mary is the mother of all Christians, and this brings us closer to her and makes us confident in asking for her intercession.

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<sup>187</sup> R. Murray, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, 144.

<sup>188</sup> D. M. Crossan, "Mary's Virginity in St. John-an Exegetical Study", in *Marianum* 19, (1957), 125.

#### 4.8. Mary's Continuous Intercession

The basis of Mary's mediation is what she is and what she has done. Mar Jacob, in the homily *On the Virgin* enumerated the blessings that humanity received on account of Mary. It was with her that the Father sent us "tidings full of good things" and "forgiveness to all condemned for their bonds of sins." By her, Adam who had been enslaved became an heir and reconciliation was achieved between the heavenly beings and the earthly.<sup>189</sup>

She gave us a sweet fruit, full of life,  
that we might eat from it and live forever with God.<sup>190</sup>

Mary is crowned as queen and the celestial assembly sings songs of praise as she dwells among them. We know from the Old Testament that in the Kingdom of Israel a queen had special access to the King, and for this reason Bathshe'ba dared to plead to King Solomon on behalf of Adoni'jah. When she said to him that: "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me," the King said to her "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you" (1 Kings 2:18-20). Mary was crowned queen as she entered into heavenly glory. She is in heaven and as mother of the members of the body of Christ, she pleads for us before the heavenly throne.

Mary's intercessory role springs from her dignity of divine motherhood<sup>191</sup> and it is a logical consequence of her assumption into heaven. Having been taken up into heaven she is with her Son. That Mary is a member of the community of the believers and that she enjoys glory with the Risen Lord is the basis for us to ask for

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 39.

<sup>190</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 40.

<sup>191</sup> The Holy Father in the Encyclical *Mother of the Redeemer*, has affirmed that the divine maternity is the basis of Mary's mediative activity. Cf. John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, Boston, 1987, 31.



her intercession. In interpreting this passage T. R. Hurst has written:

All generations not only call her the Blessed One but bear witness to her intimate union with us by her sharing in death, one of the most human of all experiences. While intimately joined to her divine Son, she is fully human and, therefore, can be called upon in prayer by believers. As with every aspect of the mystery of God's plan of salvation, it is the human race that receives God's great gifts, in this case for Jacob, it is the gift of a blessed woman who intercedes for all believers and who is a sign of hope of eternal life.<sup>192</sup>

The intercessions that Mar Jacob made at the end of the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary* are not prayers 'to' Mary, but are prayers addressed to the Son of God through Mary's mediation, just as at the miracle of Cana. The Christians who seek Mary's intercessions believe that she is now in heaven and that the Lord hears her prayers. As R. N. Beshara writes, we ask her to pray for us so that "we may receive forgiveness and eternal love at the moment of our deaths."<sup>193</sup> Mary's intercession is sought for the needs of mankind. Mar Jacob has an intercessory prayer at the end of the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*.

O Son of God, by her prayers make your peace to dwell  
in heaven, in the depths, and among all the counsels of her  
sons.

Make wars to cease, and remove trials and plagues;  
bestow calm and tranquillity on seafarers.  
Heal the infirm, cure the sick, fill the hungry;  
be a Father to orphans whom death has left destitute.  
In your pity, drive out devils who harass mankind,  
and exalt your Church to the four quarters of the globe, that it  
may sing your praise.

<sup>192</sup> T. R. Hurst, "The «Transitus» of Mary in a Homily of Jacob of Sarug", in *Marianum* 140, (1990), 99.

<sup>193</sup> R. N. Beshara, *Mary Ship of Treasures*, 98-99.

Watch over priests and purify ministers:  
 be a guardian of old age and youth.  
 O Bridegroom Christ, to you be praise from every mouth,  
 and on us be mercy at all times. Amen, Amen.<sup>194</sup>

As mentioned earlier this prayer is not addressed “to” Mary, and this is based on the belief that she incessantly prays for all. She is praying for all people who find difficulty in their life situation. Mar Jacob expresses the hope that by Mary’s prayer the peace of the Son of God may remain in the whole world. In the *bōūtho* حُذْمَا of the *quqliōn* قُمْلِيُون of the Blessed Virgin, the Syro-Malankara Church prays thus: “By your cross, Lord Jesus, and by the prayer of Mary who brought you forth, make to pass and banish from us the scourge and the rod of wrath.”<sup>195</sup> The Lord’s cross upon which He gave up His life, is the sign of our redemption. Mary was a humble girl who consented to become the Mother of the Son of God and gave Him human birth. Hence, the Lord’s Cross and Mary’s prayer are the mediating agents which plead for humanity before the throne of justice.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored Mar Jacob’s views on the redemption achieved by Christ. Redemption was accomplished through Christ’s Incarnation, earthly life, passion, death, resurrection and ascension. Mar Jacob has described Incarnation and Ascension of Christ using the Judeo Christian vocabulary of the “ascent” and “descent” of the Son of God. We have also analysed the symbols “Lamb of God”, “Bridegroom”, “Physician” and the “Tree of Life” which Mar Jacob used to describe Christ as the Redeemer. Through these symbols he delineates how the Son of God made it possible for humanity to enter Paradise and how He redeemed the Church.

In the last part we have tried to see how Mary participated in the redemption of humanity. She participated in our redemption by

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<sup>194</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 99-100.

<sup>195</sup> *The Divine Liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Rite*, 41.

giving birth to the Son of God and by staying with Him throughout His life till the moment of His crucifixion. We quote here a passage from the homily *On the Virgin* concerning the wonderful event of the Annunciation at which Mary received the message of salvation:

The Watcher sent by the Son, went and stood firm against  
these things;  
to Mary he brought the tidings of salvation from God.<sup>196</sup>

Mar Jacob in these homilies has presented Mary as one who paves the way for the new alliance and who faithfully follows the plan of God. The response of Israel to the covenant was "all that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8). In the beginning of the new covenant God chose Mary. Throughout her life she was faithful to the promise made at the time of the Annunciation. Now, as one who enjoys heavenly glory, she intercedes for us before the Son of God. Just as she said to the servants at Cana: "do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5), she exhorts us today to do the will of God.

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<sup>196</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 31.



# GENERAL CONCLUSION

The symbols employed by Mar Jacob serve as a light to illumine our vision of the mystery of Mary. Along with the Semitic background in which Mar Jacob was born and brought up, he combined his biblical expertise and poetic imagery. The symbols look like the various icons of an iconostasis. Just as icons lead us to worship, these symbols invite our attention to the divine mystery and call us to enter into the mystery of Mary. As J. Forest states: “The icon is not an end in itself but assists us in going beyond what can be seen with our physical eyes into the realm of mystical silence.”<sup>1</sup> This is all the more true about the symbolic presentations of Mary by Mar Jacob of Serugh. They enable us to see the inner beauty of Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Son of God. From our study of the Mariological homilies of Mar Jacob we learn that one should not look for any dogmatic affirmation, but rather “admire” his symbolic-poetic depiction of Mary as the most holy, beautiful and faithful daughter of David, in whom the Son of God resided.

Mar Jacob’s exegesis was typological and spiritual. In his typological approach to Scripture, as we have seen in his homily *On Samson*, Mar Jacob presented Samson as a type of Christ carrying His hidden mysteries. Thus, Mar Jacob could present Christ as being hidden in the Old Testament. In a better way, one can say that the Old Testament and New Testament form one unit in Divine Revelation. As a teacher (*malpono* مَلْفُون) of Scripture and a catechist, he did not confine biblical interpretation merely to analytical study but he made use of an occasion to impart theological and moral meaning to the believers.

## 1. Symbolic Treatment of the Mystery of Mary

In chapters two, three and four I have dealt with his understanding of Mary’s divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity and Mary as the hope of humanity. Mar Jacob approached these mysteries and tried to explain them in terms of biblical symbols.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Forest, *Praying with Icons*, 13.

The use of these symbols primarily indicates that Mariology is not an independent subject to be treated in isolation, but is intrinsically related to Christology.

The second chapter deals with Mar Jacob's thoughts on the divine motherhood of Mary. Here the various biblical symbols employed to describe this mystery are briefly analysed. They are: "ark of the covenant", "second heaven", "shining castle", "pure temple", "celestial chariot", "new well", "tabernacle", and the "cloud of Mount Sinai." The symbolic presentation of Mary as the "ark of the covenant" remains unique. In calling Mary the "ark of the covenant", Mar Jacob convinced the readers that Mary's character was excellent without any spot, and just like pure stainless gold, she was the worthiest person in the whole of humanity in whom the Son of God dwelt.

Mar Jacob, as the "icon-maker" of Mary succeeded in depicting her image using the pigments of biblical symbols. His drawing of a beautiful icon of Mary was not done in isolation from her Son. This depiction corresponds exactly to the *Znamenye* icon about which T. Spidlik has said: "Through contemplation, the Logos born of her body rests forever in her heart, as is illustrated by the *Znamenye* icon, the praying Virgin with the divine Word on her heart."<sup>2</sup> Thus through the symbols pertaining to Mary's motherhood, Mar Jacob could also show that her honour and greatness derive from the Son of God who is born from her.

In the third chapter I have dealt with Mary's virginity which is another aspect of her mystery which Mar Jacob treated in his homilies. Mary is virgin mother (*ēmo b'ēthūltho* ܐܡܐ ܒܥܬܘܠܬܐ) and her Son is Son of the Virgin (*bro d'b'ēthūltho* ܒܪܐ ܕܒܥܬܘܠܬܐ). Mar Jacob's stance is clear: if one admitted that Mary remained a virgin in birthing, it is a sign of one's conviction that her Son is the Son of God. However, in dealing with the virginal conception and the virginal parturition which are outside the laws of nature, he was differentiating between God, the perfect being who is not subject to the laws of "becoming" and man, who instead is subject to such

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<sup>2</sup> T. Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 159.

laws. To describe this mystery he employed symbols of the “closed door”, “sealed letter”, “unploughed land”, “unpruned vine”, “thirsty land” and “Gideon’s fleece.”

The principle that lies behind Mary’s virginal conception is that what was impossible for man became possible because of God’s mercy (*hānōno* ܚܢܐܢܐ), intervention and love which Mar Jacob expressed in utilizing the symbols of the “unploughed land” and the “unpruned vine.” He described Mary’s impossibility of conceiving a child without a marital relationship as follows: the Great One dwelt in the small and “barren womb” of Mary. Mary’s virginal conception is a wonder. God Himself allowed His all-pervading presence to be manifested in a small place and in a small object. This was depicted in the symbol “Gideon’s Fleece” on which dew was showered.

In the fourth chapter we have looked at Mary as the “hope of humanity.” The restoration of humanity to its original state was realized in Mary. The history of salvation can be characterized as the story of the “fall” and “rise” of the elected people; Christ, the hope of humanity, came to human birth at the forty second generation (Mt 1:1-17; Cf. the biblical foundation of the symbol of the “powerful city” in the fourth chapter). Mar Jacob, in presenting Mary’s role in bringing forth hope to humanity looks at her response to the angel and her co-operation in the divine plan with wonder and represents it by different symbols: “powerful city”, “second Eve”, “ship of treasure”, and the “new pitcher of Elisha.”

In expressing the hope of humanity, he stated that *treasures* and *blessings* came to the needy world so that “it might live from Him.” In applying this symbolism to Faith and the Sacraments, we see that today the faithful can be enriched by the “treasure”, of the Eucharist.

In the fifth chapter I have dealt with Christ’s redemption and Mary’s role in it. Being rooted in a Semitic background Mar Jacob describes salvation in terms of the “descent” and “ascent” of Christ. Christ in His “descent” to man, united man to God by accomplishing the true human destiny from which man had turned away. In His “ascent” to heaven, He helped humanity also to



ascend. The key expression pertaining to this theme was that in order to redeem man, Christ, “the fashioner of babes” fashioned for Himself a body in the womb of Mary. As we have cited under the title, *Redemption Realized in History* in the fifth chapter, “He died and delivered us, and He rose from the sepulchre and took us up with Him.” The two Syriac words *pōruqo* ܦܪܘܩܐ (Redeemer) and *mahyono* ܡܚܝܢܐ (Saviour) refer to Christ, the Redeemer, who “bought us with His blood and restored us to life.” We have studied four Christological symbols employed by Mar Jacob: the Lamb of God, the bridegroom, the physician and the tree of life.

In the last part of the chapter, we have dealt with Mary’s participation in Christ’s redemption. Her voluntary co-operation in the Incarnation was an exercise of her freedom. The role that Mary played in the Incarnation was very crucial in human redemption. Just like Abraham who inaugurated the Old Covenant and acted according to faith, she, by responding to God in a relational way (1 Cor 3:9), became “a blessing” for the “New Israel.” In dwelling upon her visit to Elizabeth, Mar Jacob presented her as having imparted the Holy Spirit to others.

Mary remained faithful to this commitment till the end of her life. She suffered with Christ as He endured the agony of the Cross and died. Just as she shared in the Incarnation of the Word, so also she shared in the mystery of Christ’s redeeming death, which Mar Jacob dealt with in his homily *On the death and Burial of Mary*. Although the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection are reticent about Mary’s presence at the tomb of the Risen Lord, according to Mar Jacob, Mary was a testimony of the Resurrection.

Mary’s share in the reconciliation and sanctification of humanity is a corollary to her divine maternity. Mar Jacob’s description of Mary’s glorious entry into heaven is the apex of his depiction of Mary. The Resurrection and the ascension of our Lord is the foundation of the concept of Mary’s glorious entry into heaven. Her glorious entry into heaven is a prefigure of our future glory. Considering Mary’s “yes” to the divine message, he called her the “mouth of the Church.” She is the mother of all Christians

and this brings us closer to her and makes us confident to ask for her intercessions.

## 2. Appraisal, Evaluation and Observation

In evaluating Mar Jacob's mariological homilies, we assert in the first place, that the advantage of his mariological thoughts consisted in responding to a topic which was relevant and necessary in his time. Secondly, it seems that he dealt with this theme in a very "dispassionate" way, always keeping in mind that whatever he wrote should not exceed what God willed. Thirdly, being the first Syriac Father in the West Syrian Church to speak about Mary's glorious entry into heaven, he might have given the green light to the introduction of the feast of Mary's Assumption on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. We presume that he stands in the transitional stage between the Apocryphal Writings on Mary's Assumption and the liturgical celebration of this feast. Hence, Mar Jacob is important in a dogmatic study on this topic.<sup>3</sup>

Mar Jacob's writings, as has already been mentioned are generally recognized as "dispassionate." But as an exception, we have come across a few serious references to Nestor and the Nestorian heresy in his homily *On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* which may even give us cause to doubt this "dispassionate" character in his writings. Open discussions and honest research in the official and non-official realms of the Church have brought out the conclusion that Nestorius himself was not a "Nestorian." All the

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<sup>3</sup> Here, we thought of commenting that the topic on "Die Vollerlöste-Mariens Aufnahme in den Himmel und ihre Verherrlichung" in *Maria in der Heilsgeschichte* by L. Scheffczyk and A. Ziegenaus is incomplete, without the mention of Mar Jacob's description about Mary's Assumption into heaven, referred to in the homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*. In this volume there are 22 pages which deal with Mary's Assumption and her glory in heaven. Concerning this matter, there is mention from the time of Epiphanius (+ 403) who did not give any information about Mary's death to the Papal Bulla "Munificentissimus Deus", but no reference is made to Mar Jacob who spoke about Mary's glorious entry into heaven. Cf. L. Scheffczyk & A. Ziegenaus, *Maria in der Heilsgeschichte: Katholische Dogmatik*, Vol. V, Achen, 1998, 309-331.



Christological controversies were due to the different terminologies that each group used.

## **2.1. The Advantage of Mar Jacob's Methodology**

The topic dealt with in Mar Jacob's homilies does not pertain to the realm of verifiable science, but to the realm of faith, whose objectivity is not verifiable in a laboratory. Hence, Mar Jacob's symbolic-poetic theology, in which he employed biblical symbols has a great relevance. The methodology that Mar Jacob applied is very effective in the sense that the listener is invited to enter into the very mystery that is under discussion. He portrayed the Incarnation as the fulfillment of the promise made in the Old Testament (Gen 3) and Mary as the worthy mother of the Son of God of whom the prophets prophesied. The All powerful God became a human being by going through the "misery" of a humble life situation. A poor virgin is chosen to be the mother of the Son of God. The mother who conceived him without marital relationship remained a virgin in birth-giving. Scripture contained symbols which prefigured the mystery of Mary. The advantage of this sort of approach consists in the fact that Mar Jacob's audience is familiar with the expressions in the Holy Scripture. They understood the theological implications behind the symbols when they were made use of in his homilies.

## **2.2. The Ecumenical Relevance**

Mar Jacob's attitude towards the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon has already been mentioned. His view was that faith was already defined in Nicea and Constantinople and nothing could be added to it. When we judge his stance, we understand that there is something positive in his position; that is that the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon endangered the unity of the Church. With the Council of Ephesus, the Church of Assyro-Chaldea was divided from the Universal Church. The Council of Chalcedon effected the separation of the ecclesial communities who held on to the Christological position "One Nature of the Incarnate Word" propagated by Cyril. For Mar Jacob, it was important that the Church remains one and grows as one. Perhaps Mar Jacob's views on this aspect might remain a caution for us today, to fully reflect on



the necessity and advantage before defining new dogmatic formulations on Mary. We also would like to point out that these new dogmatic formulations<sup>4</sup> might hinder ecumenical relations with the Churches which are not in communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup>

The Fathers of the Church are the common patrimony of the Church. The Eastern Catholic Churches, in common with their Orthodox counterparts, have Faith and Revelation, liturgy, devotional practices and the teachings of the Fathers as their heritage. So, the study of patristic writings enriches both Churches by contributing to their common treasury. This is more true when the theme is Mariological, for Mary is venerated in both Churches using the very same hymns and symbols. The Assyro-Chaldean Church which is known to have rejected the title of "Theotokos", gives as much importance as the Orthodox to the role of Mary, as S. Brock has written: "In actual fact, the Christological differences that

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia has clarified the Greek Orthodox Church's position towards defining Mary as Co-Redeemer, and has said that such a dogmatic formulation "will inevitably give rise to misunderstanding." He sums up his Church's position this way: "From apostolic times, Christ's birth, death and resurrection were openly made known in the Church's public preaching, proclaimed from the housetops for all the world to hear. But the mystery of his Mother forms part of the Church's inner, secret tradition, that is revealed only through prayer and doxology to those inside the Church. In the words of the Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky: "It is not so much an object of faith as a foundation of our hope, a fruit of faith, ripened in tradition. Let us therefore keep silence, and let us not try to dogmatise about the supreme glory of the Mother of God." K. Ware, "No New Dogmas Please", 93.

<sup>5</sup> R. Greenacre, an Anglican ecumenist has said that if Mary were defined as Co-Redeemer, that would be "the end of ecumenism." He was one of the non-Roman Catholic participants of the commission set up to study "whether it was possible and opportune to define the Marian titles of Mediator, Co-Redeemer and Advocate." This is his view on the topic: "[...] to do so would reverse the theological line taken by the Second Vatican Council, which set itself against any further Mariological definitions and put all its thinking about Mary very firmly in the context of its reflection on Christ and on the Church. The commission noted in the second place that any such definition would run counter to the priority given to ecumenical dialogue by the present Pope in his encyclicals *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* and *Ut Unum Sint*." R. Greenacre, "Mother of All Christians", in *Tablet* 24, (1998), 121.

separate the Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Churches and the Church of the East do not appear to have had much effect on their attitudes to Mary, at least outside technical theological discussions.”<sup>6</sup>

Mar Jacob was conscious of the after effects of using the term “Mother of God”, and that might have been the reason why he did not often use this expression. He was living and working in the area where the members of the Assyro-Chaldean Church became separated through not accepting the terminology of the “Mother of God.” As a peace loving man, it seems to us that Mar Jacob, though convinced of Mary’s divine maternity and once using the expression *yoldāth ālōho* in reference to it, was carefully avoiding polemic expressions.

### 3. The Importance of Mar Jacob’s Homilies in the Malankara Liturgy

We have mentioned the liturgies that have incorporated Mar Jacob’s writings. He is well-known in the Syro-Malankara Church through the “*bōūtho* ܒܘܬܐ of Mar Jacob”, though many members do not recognize that it is named after Mar Jacob of Serugh. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church which has not developed a systematic Mariology, venerates Mary in the divine liturgy. Here an elaborate study on the Mariological aspects in the liturgy is out of place, however, we will point out three aspects. Firstly, the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church begins with the commemoration of Mary and John the Baptist. “Mary who brought you forth and John who baptized you shall be intercessors in our behalf; have mercy on us.”<sup>7</sup> The Mother of God and the Forerunner are remembered in the beginning of the Holy Eucharist because they presented the Word to the world. As S. Bulgakov in commenting about the “Deisis” icon (a group depicting the Saviour enthroned, with the Virgin and the Forerunner at His right and left hand respectively) wrote: “The Virgin and the

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<sup>6</sup> S. Brock, “Introduction” to *Jacob of Serugh: On the Mother of God*, in M. Hansbury, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *The Divine Liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Rite*, 16.



Precursor stand together before the Incarnate Word as representing the summit and the glory of creation; they are nearer to Him than the world of angels.”<sup>8</sup> They are remembered and celebrated in order to introduce the mystery of the Incarnation in the divine liturgy.

Secondly, there is a prayer called *quqliōn* قُمْلِيُون, which is sung to commemorate the Blessed Virgin Mary. *Quqlion* قُمْلِيُون is a cycle of Psalms with halleluiah. In this *quqliōn*, halleluiah is inserted into the Psalm 45 in verse 9-10. So far we have not come across a commentary regarding these lines of the *quqliōn*. However, we understand that in employing this Psalm, the Church looks on Mary as one who reached the zenith of glory that is the maximum possible for a human being. And this glory consisted in her self-renunciation (implied through “forget your people and your father’s house”) which led to Mary’s being elected as the Mother of the Son of God. Besides, in the Divine liturgy, this prayer is sung in monasteries and churches as part of the *Ramšo* رَمْشَا (evening prayer) and also as part of Para-liturgical celebrations.

Thirdly, Marian feasts are given importance in the liturgical calendar of the Syro-Malankara Church. The faithful earnestly observe a fast of eight days and of fifteen days in preparation for the nativity and assumption of Mary respectively. In the weekly celebrations, this Church commemorates the Mother of God on Wednesday. The feast of Annunciation is of prime importance in the West Syrian tradition. Concerning this feast, the compiler of a Syriac Orthodox calendar copied in North Iraq in 1689, commented: “As for the Feast of the Annunciation, the Church celebrates it on whichever day of the week the 25<sup>th</sup> falls: even if it falls on Good Friday, we still celebrate the Liturgy, since the Annunciation is the beginning and source of all other feasts.”<sup>9</sup> To speak about the other feasts celebrated throughout the liturgical year of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, it would be good to cite E. M. Toniolo:

Il calendario liturgico-mariano della Chiesa siro-occidentale ha in comune con la Chiesa siro-orientale il periodo delle annunciazioni o *Suboro* che precede il Natale (6 domeniche), la festa delle Congratulazioni alla Madre di Dio (26

<sup>8</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 125.

<sup>9</sup> S. Brock, “Introduction”, in *Jacob of Serugh: On the Mother of God*, ET M. Hansbury, 3.



Decembre), le tre commemorazioni legate all'agricoltura (la festa delle sementi, delle spighe, delle vigne); ha in comune col rito bizantino le feste dell'infanzia di Maria (concezione di Anna, Natività Presentazione al tempio) el'Annunciazione il 25 marzo. Anche per i sirio-occidentali la più grande festa della vergine è la sua "Dormizione" o "Migrazione" (Koimesis) al cielo.<sup>10</sup>

When we look into the content of prayers used on these feast days, we find in these texts the symbols that we have studied in Mar Jacob. Mary's relationship to God and her co-operation in the work of salvation is unique. Mar Jacob's *mêmrê* on Mary are unique in Mariological literature. Mar Jacob, through his *mêmrê* invites his audience to admire the beauty of the wonder that has taken place in Mary, the Mother of the Son of God. However, the theological implication of these *mêmrê* is not limited to Mariology, but leads one to Christ, the Redeemer.

Mar Jacob wondered at Mary's heroic decision in consenting to co-operate with God. In his depiction of Mary he presented her as having uniquely reached the perfection possible for a human being. He presented this in a special way while narrating her glorious entry into heaven in his homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*. His beautiful depiction of Mary combined with the biblical symbols and poetic imagery is an overflowing of his deep and genuine devotion to Mary.

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<sup>10</sup> E. M. Toniolo, "Maria nelle chiese orientali", 470.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i> , Vatican City.
AMS	<i>Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum</i> .
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</i> , Manchester.
CO	<i>Christian Orient</i> , Kottayam.
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> , Louvain.
Denz.	H. Denzinger, <i>Enchiridion Symbolorum</i> (Collection of Church Documents).
DM	<i>Dictionary of Mary</i> , Revised and Expanded Edition, New Jersey, 1997.
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers.
DSp	<i>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique</i> , Paris, 1937-1995.
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i> .
EEC	<i>Encyclopedia of the Early Church</i> , produced by Institutum Patristicum augustinianum, A. de BERARDINO (ed.) ET A. WALFORD, Vol. I. Cambridge, 1992.
ed.	Editor.
eds.	Editors.
Ep.	<i>Epistulae quotquot supersunt I. Sarugensis</i> .
ET	English Translation.
Ethl	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i> .
FT	French Translation.
GT	German Translation.

HS	<i>Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis.</i>
HTM	The Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, USA.
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> , Oxford.
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i> , Document of Vatican Council II, 21.11.1964, AAS 57 (1965), 5-67, ed., FLANNERY, A., Dublin, 1992.
LT	Latin Translation.
NAKG	<i>Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis</i> , Leiden.
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i> , Rome.
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i> , Rome.
OrChr	<i>Oriens Christianus</i> , Leipzig, Wiesbaden.
OrSyr	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i> , Paris.
OS	<i>Ostkirchliche Studien</i> , Würzburg.
OR	<i>L'Osservatore Romano</i> , Vatican City.
PdO	<i>Parole de l'Orient</i> , Kaslik, Libanon.
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , Paris.
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> , Paris-Turnhout.
PS	<i>Patrologia Syriaca</i> , Paris.
SCC	Seeri Correspondence Course, on Syrian Christian Tradition, SEERI, Kottayam.
SCS	<i>Syrian Church Series</i> , Kottayam.
SChr	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Paris.
SD	<i>Syriac Dialogue</i> I-III, Vienna. (Non-official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition, Vienna).
SEERI	St. Ephrem's Ecumenical Research Institute, Kottayam.
SHF	<i>Six Homélies Festales en Prose.</i>
SMS	<i>S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona, quae supersunt omnia.</i>



Sob/ECR	<i>Sobornost</i> Incorporated with the <i>Eastern Churches Review</i> , London.
SSS	Studies in Syriac Spirituality.
StPat.	<i>Studia Patristica</i> , Kalamazoo, Louvain.
Sub.	Subsidia.
Syr.	Syriac.
Syri.	Scriptores Syri.
TV	<i>The True Vine</i> , Roslindale, USA.
ZFKTh	Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie.

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## APPENDIX

### HOMILY ON THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY<sup>1</sup>

685

Son of the Virgin, whose homily is too exalted for the wise ones,  
fill me with your gift, may I be illumined and I may speak of your nativity.

Hidden One, who is distant and entirely concealed from the disputants,  
reveal yourself to me and I may speak of you without disputation.

5 Son of the Majesty, who willed to come to smallness,  
magnify my words with songs that I may recite your beauties.

Son of the Highest One, who among the controversies is ineffable,  
give me your love that I may sing to you by it without controversy.

686

O Great One, who willed that the small womb might become His  
dwelling,

10 be pleased that with words, I may recite Your story lovingly.

The Father gave You freely to the world because of His love,<sup>2</sup>  
in that love, cast Your gift upon the needy ones.

With great price Your love bought us from the captors,  
you freely gave us mercies to the whole world.

15 You poured for me Your precious blood and with it You bought me,  
possess me since You have bought me, and enable me to possess Your  
word that I may recite Your story.

I with price (am bought) and You my Lord were freely sold,  
what does the world have to give and then to buy You?

What would Your hidden Father have received for His Beloved,  
20 if He had given You with a great price on account of us?

It is pleasing to Him that He gave You freely to mankind,

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<sup>1</sup> Syriac text: JACOB OF SERUGH, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia*, ed. BEDJAN, P., Paris, 1902, 685-708.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn 3:16.



since if You had to be bought for a great price, no one would have  
bought You.

Who would have had something to give as Your price, Son of God,  
or what was there to him who would buy You to be exchanged for it?

25 Or what did Your own Father have taken so that He gave You?  
because all the worlds and their inhabitants are not worthy for You.

Since He saw that no one could give Your price and take You,  
so, He gave You freely so that all might be rich in You.

The Father in His love freely gave us His Only Begotten,<sup>3</sup>  
30 let us speak about Him with love, in simple words, which are not  
disputed.

687

Not in controversy, and not in strife, and not in disputation,  
and not in craftiness which generates words in debates.

We received Him freely, let us be pleased with Him, without contest.  
in His meadows He introduced us to feed, and let us rest sweetly.

35 He placed His body in front of the flock whom He bought with His  
blood  
hear, infirm, and do not learn to hit each other.

Who will not be enriched by the gift that has come freely?  
and who will not enjoy the banquet that is full of life?

Love knows how to enjoy the Son of God  
40 because without controversy, it sucks Life from Him every day.

A homily of glory is proposed by love to speak,  
but without disputing or investigating the Only-Begotten.

Love seeks to admire the Son, not to investigate,  
it knows how to worship: it is not easy for it to be bold in searching  
out.

45 That Wonder which is unsearchable dwelt in the Virgin<sup>4</sup>  
and the wise ones have thronged to investigate His way in debates.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jn 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Is 9:6.

He went out from the womb and put seals on virginity,  
and the words full of scandal burst forth about His nativity.

50 The virgin gave birth, the scribes increased their malice,  
to investigate the matter which except in wonder, is not to be spoken  
about.

Our Lord set the way which is more exalted than the enquirers,  
and behold, fools who have gone astray are crazed to make enquiries.  
688

Mary is calumniated by those who are far and near,  
and her homily is swallowed up by the Jews and pagans.

55 The foreigners as well as the familiar ones talk foolishly about her  
and the friends and adversaries speak about her according to their  
pleasure.

The Jews calumniate her Child (saying) that (He) is not from the  
Father,  
neither did she conceive nor did she give birth in her virginity.

They blaspheme about her that she conceived the Son as a result of  
sexual union,  
60 and the Son who dwelt in her is not the Power of the hidden Father.

The pagan who is far, (says) neither did she give birth, nor that she  
exists,  
he does not even know that the blessed woman has a Son.

Another fool, who is neither a Jew nor a pagan,  
talks idly about her, that the body of the Son is not from her.

65 One wicked person says that she did not give birth to God,  
but the Messiah, since the Messiah is not God.

And among these discourses, words and schisms that have taken place,  
again they calumniate her, namely that she did not remain in her  
virginity.

In parturition, the virginal signs are loosened from her, according to  
their words,  
70 and from the time of parturition onwards, she is not said to be a virgin.

They do not say that in her parturition, her virginal seal was protected.  
but in her parturition, she lost, they say, her virginity.

Among these spirits of scandals and doubts,

what will he do, who confesses with simplicity?

689

- 75 Stand up, Instruction, and preach the truth without perturbation,  
and proclaim openly the truth which is more exalted than the doubts.

Rebuke the Jews and reprove the gentiles and unite the dissidents  
curb the controversies and drive away scandals from the presumptuous  
ones.

- 80 Make silent the wise from that uninvestigable womb,  
so that they do not go crazy in their disputes over her parturition.

Drive away the learned from that womb of the blessed one,  
so that they do not speak with controversy while investigating her.

Refute the speakers and disputants and be profit to them,  
and raise them to wonder with great admiration.

- 85 The fruit to whom the wonderful one gave birth, His name is  
‘Wonder.’<sup>5</sup>

O wise one, come and admire without investigating.

Draw near, O disputant, and take wonder from the daughter of David,  
do not dare to scrutinize, because you are not able.

- 90 Eloquent teacher, see a matter which is more exalted than you,  
and take silence for yourself, and do not be disturbed in debates.

Sons of discipline, who are full of love and faith,  
I am speaking to you, listen to me in a discerning manner.

The matter of Mary is not to be interpreted by the wise,  
and the orators cannot speak with the course of their words.

690

- 95 Love can speak about her matter without disputation,  
with a simplicity which is higher and purer than controversy.

Let us now give attention to love which has risen to speak,  
without investigating about the virgin Mother, who is full of wonder.

The Jew is despised by Isaiah, the son of his people,

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<sup>5</sup> Is 9:6.



100 who preached that: “the Virgin will give birth without union.”

The pagan will learn from the regions and confines of the earth,  
because wherever he goes, behold, the Son of the Virgin will be  
spoken about.

Another one foolishly says that she has not given birth to God in  
wonder,  
the Church makes her voice resound with anathema that he will not  
enter in her.

105 And as for the fool who denies that the body of the Son was from her,  
she also hates him and his teaching and flees away from him.

And upon him who says that the Son in His coming out dissolved the  
virginal signs,  
the Church has a discourse today, to narrate.

Let all of these (others) keep silence today with their scandals,

110 and let the matter of this one enter, so that he too may become  
ashamed.

The one who calumniates that she did not remain in her virginity,  
after her birthing, let love reprove without argument.

Let all the doubts be completely silent, being overcome  
and only against one (opponent) let the word raise today its voice.

115 Let him introduce his words and show us what he is saying  
and after having said (it), let him hear from us the truth.

691

“While Mary was pregnant she remained in her virginity,  
because conjugal union, which would dissolve the virginal signs, has  
not drawn near the pure one.

But when she was giving birth, on account of the fact that she gave  
birth to Him corporeally,

120 the child in His coming out dissolved the virginal signs, for He took a  
body.

Whoever says that He did not dissolve the virginal signs when He had  
come out,  
has despised the Son, (saying) that He did not take body from the  
daughter of David.

But he who confesses that His bodily nature is from Mary,

understands that He had not come out in her virginity.

125 In the coming out of the child, who came to birth according to bodily  
nature,  
He did not leave the virginal signs in the womb when He came out.

Whoever says that He has body, sensation and blood,  
would also say that in His nativity He dissolved the virginal signs of  
His mother.

And whoever would say that her virginity remained in its place,  
130 would say together with this that the Son of God did not take body.”

The fool says these things concerning the matter of the blessed one,  
now, let love say its words clearly.

O audacious man, if it is so as you say,  
also the child that Mary gave birth, is not a Wonder.

135 If you have explained the whole matter in your wisdom,  
wonder is taken away from the history and everything is revealed.

But there is still something greater which is hidden to you,  
you have investigated the Son and His nativity and (so) you are very  
great!  
692

And if this is so, you are the Wonder wherever you go,  
140 and, behold yours is the name that Isaiah has given to the Son!<sup>6</sup>

With you stays all the Wonder, as much as you are capable of it,  
since you are capable of comprehending all the way of the Son.

The Wonder passes away from the nativity of the Son of God,  
and you have taken it by force and no one wonders at anyone but you!

145 You are the wonder and in you is the admiration, if it is true,  
since you are able to investigate the way which is more exalted than  
the enquirers.

Never does the Scripture teach me two wonders,

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<sup>6</sup> Is 9:6.

otherwise, it would have been (possible) to believe that you are a wonder.

O haughty scholar, give to the Unique One what is His,

150 while not investigating, be indebted to His story and be amazed in Him.

Give His wonder to Him, since apart from Him, there is no Wonder, and take silence for yourself, because your word is too short to reach Him.

The virgin conceived Him, and she was a virgin when she gave birth to Him, because of this His name is “wonder”, which is unexplainable.

155 Among the pains of mothers and of the children,  
He preserved her virginal signs (in a way) that you do not know how to comprehend.

If there had been in your soul the wonder of faith,  
that wonder would have preserved you from doubts.

If you had understood why Isaiah called him “Wonder”,  
160 you would have admired Him without investigating into the Unique One.  
693

The body of the blessed one was full of virginal signs and milk,  
and because of this her Son is a Wonder to the one who understands it.

If He is a Wonder, the report of His way is better than you,  
Whereas if you have explained how He was born, then He is not a Wonder.

165 Both in her conceiving and in her giving birth, His mother is a virgin,  
and the name is appropriate that every one should call Him Wonder.

He found the virginal signs (there) when He dwelt in the glorious one,  
and He left her womb sealed as He had found.

Since He dwelt in the daughter of the poor one, she was greatly enriched,

170 the Son of the Rich One did not make her poor nor empty.

The fairest among women was most beautiful, for she brought forth the Sun,<sup>7</sup>

and He did not corrupt, nor disfigure the beauty of her virginity.

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<sup>7</sup> Mal 4:2.



Had she not been a virgin, and had the Son of the Creator dwelt in her,  
it would have been proper for Him to leave her a virgin when He was  
coming out.

175 But since she was a virgin, when she received Him, He did not  
corrupt  
the beauty of her womb which carried Him in a holy manner.

What reward would the handmaid have received, who brought up her  
Lord?  
it is unjust that we should say that because of Him she lost her  
virginity.

She received completely beauty, blessings and sanctity,  
180 and virginity, which not even in His nativity did the Wonderful one  
dissolve.

The Light dwelt in her, who remained in pure splendour,  
so that she should become a virgin for ever and uninvestigable mother.  
694

In the prophecy, sea of mysteries and of revelations,  
the type of her who is full of mysteries, and of her virginity, was  
figured.

185 Come, Ezekiel, man who grew up among revelations,<sup>8</sup>  
scribe, who teaches truths to the one who listens to him.

Harassed prophet upon whom divine visions thronged,  
and in hiddenness he conducted himself in a godly way.

O Resplendent one, who heard the voice of the wheels<sup>9</sup> endowed with  
speech,  
190 and the sounds of the wings<sup>10</sup> and the great movement of that chariot.

O Luminous soul that saw the changed form of the Cherubim,  
and the mouths of fire, blessing the High One in his place.<sup>11</sup>

Come, the son of Buzi,<sup>12</sup> and bring the written scroll of your prophecy,

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<sup>8</sup> Ezek 3:14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Ezek 3:13.

<sup>10</sup> Ezek 10:5.

<sup>11</sup> Ezek 1:4-28.

<sup>12</sup> Ezek 1:3.

let everyone be silent, and you stand up to speak the truth.

195 If among the visions, the virgin Mary had been seen by you,  
give me her image so that the whole creation might see her beauty.

If there is the matter of the mother of your Lord in your prophecy,  
stand up and interpret it, for it is very dear to the listeners.

One or another says that after her birthing she was not virgin,  
200 do you explain to us, whether she lost her virginity.

Ezekiel, it is your lot to speak today,  
speak upon Mary and hold back the investigation about her.

Let us listen now to what was said in prophecy,  
about this marvellous mother, who is not to be investigated.

695

205 This prophet spoke in his prophecy thus:

“the Lord showed me the door of the holy of Holies and I saw it was  
closed.”

And the Lord said: that this door will remain closed,  
and again, it will not be opened, or no one will enter or go out of it.<sup>13</sup>

Since it is the Lord who will enter it, it will remain closed,  
210 prophet of the Spirit, reveal, explain to us your word, what it is.

The virgin Mary is the closed door in the prophecy,  
because the Lord Messiah entered the world by it, and left it closed.

When the Lord will enter the door, He does not open it,  
and with us also Ezekiel, the son of Hebrews, testifies.

215 By the door of nativity, God entered the world, as He wanted  
and He left that door closed in virginity.

That sanctuary, whose door the prophet saw closed,  
represents to us the Virgin and the virginity which is not dissolved.

Sanctity is the Messiah and the house of sanctity is Mary,

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<sup>13</sup> Ezek 44:2.

220 and the closed door the preserved virginal signs which stayed in her.

And in truth, if it were not so as I say,  
why did the prophet see the door and why was it closed?

He saw the door on account of the door by which man entered,  
and he saw it closed, on account of the virginal signs which He did not  
dissolve when He went out.

225 The Son of God entered by the door by which all are born,  
but He did not open the doors when He entered the world by birth.

696

He prefigured the virgin mother in the closed door,  
and to Ezekiel He showed clearly that it was closed.

And the story is true, and as that door which no one opened,  
230 thus remained in preservation the virginal seal of Mary.

The womb of the virgin is explained to us in the closed door,  
since the door is closed, sealed is the womb of virginity.

“This door will not be opened”, said the Lord,  
as some one might say, “no one will dissolve those virginal signs.”

235 The Word of the Lord sealed the womb of the blessed one,  
since not even when He was going out at His birth did He dissolve the  
virginal signs.

It was God who entered by the door of virginity,  
and He left the seals with their signs, because He was God.

Just as the door that the prophet saw and the voice he heard:  
240 namely; “since God will enter by it, it will remain closed.”<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, it stands firm to him who confesses that He is God  
to whom Mary gave birth, he confesses that she remained in her  
virginity.

He who doubts (thinking) that her Son is not God,  
adds that in going out He also dissolved the virginal signs.

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<sup>14</sup> Ezek 44:2.



245 Here let speech take its limit, without controversy,  
and it will be easy for you to confirm His mother by the Son.

If you know God as who God is,  
it is easy for you to see that the womb is preserved in virginity.  
And if doubt, hidden ulcer, has sprung up in your soul,  
250 it is difficult for you to believe that virginity remained in its place.

That door, then, which the prophet in that revelation saw,  
listen, how God was entering by it and he saw it closed.

And it was explained how, when God will pass by it,  
he will not open it and then enter as a weak one.

255 If another, who is not God that was to enter by it,  
it would be necessary that it be opened, and if it was not opened, he  
would not enter by it.

And since that door was preserved for the Lord to enter it,  
He closed it and sealed it and showed that He would altogether not  
open it.

As Mary was also in indissoluble virginity,  
260 was preserved in parturition since she gave birth to God in wonder.

If it had been a man, who is not God, to whom Mary gave birth,  
the virginal signs would have been dissolved since man cannot protect  
the virginal signs.

These are two things and one is linked to the other,  
and he who doubts this one, will not be obliged to believe this (other).

265 When he does not also admit that Mary gave birth to God,  
how does he admit that her virginity was not dissolved?

If then, he believes that she gave birth to Lord, the Only Begotten,  
he will not be in doubt that the seal of her virginity is preserved.

The way of everyone corresponds to his (own self) when he walks,  
698  
270 and how he is, he unbinds and binds in the way he sets out his journey.

If he is poor, his poverty accompanies him,  
and if he is rich, his pomp is well known and it is not hidden.

If a king wants to gird himself for a journey, the earth agitates,  
his way will be rich with the legions and armies.

275 Let us see now, who has been sent from the house of the Father,  
and who is the hidden one who has come to manifestation from the  
house of David.

If He is God, the Son of God, the Messiah, who shone forth,  
all His way is full of wonder in His manner.

Since He dwelt in the womb, the children sprang towards Him from  
wombs,  
280 and this is not so usual to take place among men.

He came to birth and sent a star to those afar,<sup>15</sup>  
so that they should bring gifts and He should make them subject with  
tributes.

He dwelt in the cave and the celestial assemblies surrounded Him<sup>16</sup>  
with the sounds of glory and with beautiful songs.<sup>17</sup>

285 Wrapped in swaddling clothes, and the assemblies of the house of  
Gabriel were singing  
and they revealed to the shepherds the mystery: who the child is.<sup>18</sup>

He came to the Holy of Holies and the old one who was bound,  
offered supplications,<sup>19</sup>  
so that the child would unbind him, for he knew it was He who had  
bound him.

He shone forth in baptism and the Father and the Spirit witnessed that  
He is God,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mt 2:2, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Lk 2:9-12.

<sup>17</sup> Lk 2:13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Lk 2:10-11.

<sup>19</sup> Lk 2:29.

<sup>20</sup> Mt 3:16-17; Mk 1:10:11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:33-34.

290 and baptism looked towards Him in order that it might be sanctified.

699

He sat at the banquet and changed water into good wine,<sup>21</sup>  
a blind man met Him, and He applied to him mud, and he saw light.<sup>22</sup>

He sent forth sound to the ears of the deaf man and opened them,<sup>23</sup>  
and He made the dark eyes shine and made them rejoice.

295 He saw the publican and broke up the yoke of injustice from his  
neck,<sup>24</sup>  
and to the sinful woman who shed tears, He rent asunder her bond.<sup>25</sup>

The afflicted one, deaf and blind and possessed with the demon,  
He healed entirely, since he was in need of health.

A girl in the house, and He raised the dead to life on the way to the  
tomb,<sup>26</sup>

300 He brought out with His voice from within a tomb the dead man who  
(already) stank.<sup>27</sup>

From the house of the dead, He set in order three witnesses in His  
way,  
to say to the earth that it is God who raised them to life.

And this way which was so great became known,  
since it was God who descended to walk in it.

305 And corresponding to His signs and greatness in all His way,  
thus (also) look at His nativity which is full of wonder.

Hidden in His essence, but the powers of His might are revealed,  
and from His manifestations it is right to believe also in His  
hiddenness.

In the beginning of the way, He did not begin without wonder:

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<sup>21</sup> Jn 2:9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Mk 8:23.

<sup>23</sup> Mk 7:35.

<sup>24</sup> Lk 5:27-32.

<sup>25</sup> Lk 7: 38-50.

<sup>26</sup> Mk 5:35; Lk 8: 49-56.

<sup>27</sup> Jn 11:43.



310 He began at nativity and He worked a new sign when He came out.

He began to fulfil Mary with wonder, on account of Him,  
so that she first, would be astonished in Him, that He is the Wonder.

700

The way which is hidden from many was revealed to her,  
the virginal signs had been hidden, and the new affair was astonishing  
to her.

315 She was worthy to see the sign hidden from all,  
since she was made worthy to be mother to the one who is hidden  
from all.

She found in herself, that she was virgin and mother,  
the virginal signs and the birthing she found in her person and she  
marvelled.

The Son of the virgin, at the beginning of His way astounded His  
mother.

320 and afterwards, He filled the others with wonder at the miracles He  
worked.

And faith, to which also hidden things are revealed,  
sees in the beginning of the way with wonder which is without  
disturbance.

And since faith knows who He is and whose son He is,  
it also looks with wonder both on His hiddenness and His manifested  
actions.

325 The heir who came to establish the earth which was laid waste,  
did not begin by corrupting the virginal signs of His mother.

He who gave resurrection to the dead to renew them,  
did not make old the new mother whom He had acquired.

He preserved the virgin, just as He was preserved in divinity,  
330 and she became mother, just as He became man in His nativity.

He is God who became man without change,  
and His mother is a virgin, who without alteration became mother.

The Messiah, in His nativity is both God and Son of man,  
just as the girl is truly virgin and mother.

701

335 She did not give birth to two, and neither can she become two,

One, she gave birth to one, divinely and humanly.

God is never similar to man in nativity,  
not even the virgin is similar to the mother, to the one who looks at  
her.

And since He clothed Himself in our body, He was made similar to us,  
and He was from us,  
340 and He made His bearer, His mother, in her virginity.

Mary is similar both to the mothers and to the virgins,  
and her son is similar both to God and to men.

He received in the womb, the image of the Father<sup>28</sup> and the image of  
the servant<sup>29</sup>  
so that in wonder He would be God, and son of man.

345 And that powerful one was made similar to us, who is similar to His  
Father,  
in all human passions except evil.<sup>30</sup>

And His mother had (lit. stood) the pains of all mothers,  
except that in His coming out, He did not dissolve the virginal signs.

And it was beautiful for her in this way to remain in her virginity,  
350 so that she might be confident who is the Father of her Only Begotten.

The Wonder<sup>31</sup> dwelt in her pure womb while shining for us,  
and if He had broken the seals in His coming out, He would not be  
Wonder.

He entered the world through the closed door, as it is written,<sup>32</sup>  
and if it had been opened, He would be neither Lord, nor God.

355 But since He came to birth and kept intact the tokens of virginity,  
everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord and Wonder.

702

Let the prophet rejoice in the mother who remained in her virginity,

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<sup>28</sup> Col 1:15.

<sup>29</sup> Phil 2:5-11.

<sup>30</sup> Heb 4:15.

<sup>31</sup> Is 9:6.

<sup>32</sup> Ezek 44:2.

and explain that (fact) to us by the door he has seen to be closed.

The Messiah has entered through it because the Father sent Him to  
visit the world,  
360 and since He is God, an opened door is not useful to him.

The one who sets in order everything did not come to corrupt nature,  
but to set in order things that are corrupt, the Father sent Him.  
He came to set in order Eve in her virginity, who has fallen,  
He did not corrupt the virgin whom He took to become His mother.

365 And what will I do to the fool who is provoked because of my words,  
and is perverted and twisted and he does not listen to me the way I  
speak?

The sound of thunder is a great silence to the ear of the deaf,  
and he does not hear even if all the creation sings.

The eye of the blind, although ten thousand suns rise,  
370 is accustomed to night, and to him the day is not useful.

The soul full of scandals and schisms of division,  
you should never speak of the truth for it is not pleasing to it.

O the doubting one, I did not speak to you, nor am I speaking,  
be silent, you will not listen, but I am speaking to him who listens to  
me.

375 If the wine of my word is not pleasing to you, do not drink it,  
leave it, there is sterile ground in which the crowds delight.

Not for wage, have I worked with you, or I am working,  
neither praise did I expect from you, nor do I seek (it).

703

I have set upon the table (things) coming from the gift of your Lord,  
380 if it is pleasing for you, enjoy with us, and if not, depart.

My will is not culpable for having loved you,  
I called you so that you may benefit and you are in want, (it comes)  
from yourself.



The virgin gave birth and called the world to supper,<sup>33</sup>

he is not with us who thinks that she had been sullied

385 True is her Son and the seal of her virginity stays on,  
and he who finds difficulty to hear this, is not invited with us.

If you believe (in) her as virgin and mother, be seated at the table,  
and if disagreement has deprived you (of faith), grant us space.

And if you want to have other demonstrations so as to convince you,  
390 it is not displeasing to me: I will toil with you, being myself benefited.

The matter of Mary is light which is spread out over the heights,  
and if he who is in darkness hears it, he is illumined.

The New Well from which gushed forth Living water,<sup>34</sup>  
and without being hewn out, she generated rushing streams to the  
thirsty world.

395 Wonderful mother, who was not joined in marriage,  
and upon whose hands is placed the child, who caused the toil of  
Adam to be forgotten.

O you who doubt about that womb which is full of wonder,  
come, admire with us the virginity which has not been dissolved.

It is difficult for you to believe because your soul is used to scandals  
400 reject doubts and come and enjoy with us in simplicity.

704

You have a single thought which hates faith,  
and that disturbs you from the profession of truth.

You think that if she gave birth bodily,  
how does body pass by (another) body and does not make a breach?

405 Come here, you who are sick, collect and take all kinds of healing,  
from the doctrine which freely heals the afflicted.

If (one) body does not pass by (another) body without making a  
breach,

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<sup>33</sup> Lk 14:15.

<sup>34</sup> Song 4:15.

come, show me that Eve made a breach in the side of Adam.<sup>35</sup>

You admit that a man gave birth to a woman and you have no  
difficulty,  
410 and you do not believe that Mary, in a virginal way, gave birth.

If you remove the virginal signs of woman with your objections,  
then, there was a breach in Adam's side, as you say.

Eve came forth and the door was not opened and you do not deny it,  
and the Son of God came forth from the womb, and you say that is  
opened.

415 A male begot, and the place of his fruit is not known,  
and the female was accused falsely because her fruit opened the door,  
when He came forth.

Adam, a man gave birth to a woman and there is no doubt,  
and Mary, a woman, since she gave birth to child, there is controversy.

Eve came forth and you do not grope about<sup>36</sup> to seek the door,  
420 and since our Lord came forth, behold, you enquire about His  
footsteps.  
705

If you are an unbeliever, take the two (away) from your teaching,  
and admit to me that neither Adam nor Mary gave birth.

It is unjust that you believe the begetting through man,  
and you falsely accuse the woman that she is corrupted as a result of  
her birthing.

425 The way of her having a child is abandoned but not that of a man  
(Adam);  
grant to her that generation of man in her virginity.

When Eve came forth, there was no breach in the integral nature,  
and how here, in the coming forth of the child are there many  
breaches?

Eve moved forward and without an open space she entered the world,  
430 and when her Lord came, the investigators made doors and open  
spaces.

From Adam's rib she came forth bodily,  
the place of his side did not suffer damage and why is this?

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<sup>35</sup> Gen 2:21.

<sup>36</sup> This alludes to Gen 19:11.

Since human beings have been in the image of divinity.  
in Eve He prefigured the nativity of the Only Begotten.

435 From the beginning He knew them and assigned them,  
Adam and Eve, in the likeness of the figure and image of His Son.

A man gave birth so that when the virgin gave fruit,  
no one would say that He dissolved the signs of her virginity.

Since the side of the man was not dissolved as a result of generating,  
440 this prefigured in the beginning how the virgin would give birth to her  
Son.

O Adam, head of the (human) race and source of the families,  
the first-born of the generations, the father of the tribes, image of the  
Great One.  
706

The image of the Most High is taken from dust fashioned in mercy:  
he (Adam) depicts types by which the virgin Mary is known.

445 In your case o Eve, a new birth, daughter of a wonder,  
glorious fruit, fair bride, adorned with mysteries.

The Rib that issued forth from the virginal side, without corrupting it,  
in order to become the type for the one who shone forth for us in her  
virginity.

O Mary, you are the house of beauties and the storehouse of treasures,  
450 the mother of the Sun, who generated unlimited light.

Fastened purse, closed door,<sup>37</sup> sealed richness,  
sealed holiness, womb preserved in virginity.

O Son of the Living One, aged child, sweet fruit,  
admirable child, older than all and younger than His mother.

455 Ancient of days, anterior to (all) generations, and today child,  
Power of the Father, inaccessible Son of the virgin.

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<sup>37</sup> Ezek 44:2.



In Adam is Your likeness, in Eve Your image and in Mary Your  
astonishment,  
the one who sees You, sees in You the wonder of wonders.

Adam indicated the virginity which carries You,  
460 Eve prefigured Your birthing which is full of wonder.

The virginal womb of Mary gave You birth in a holy manner,  
and in it mysteries had been contained and types had been hidden.

707

The ever Mighty One entered the world through the closed door,  
to capture silently the tyrant who had devastated the earth.

465 Your Generator saw that bodily birth of Yours,  
and willed to create man in the image of Your divinity.

He set the virginity of Mary as an image for Adam,  
and He formed His figure in the mother of Life when He was being  
born.

Neither in conjugal union and nor in lust was Eve conceived,  
470 and virginally a man generated her in great wonder.

And Adam and Eve became the image of the Son of God,  
whom the Father appointed for His Only-Begotten One at the  
beginning of the world.

He entered through that door by which He began to introduce human  
beings to the earth,  
He depicted the Son in the natural writings.

475 He showed to the world that the Heir of the house, when He was to  
enter in it,  
in front of Him the doors of virginity would not be opened.

And he who believes both in the nature and in the Scripture,  
has learnt that the virginity of Mary was not dissolved.

Now, let the arguments, the scandals and the impure discourses be  
silent  
480 at the sealed womb of Mary which is full of light.

The truth has blocked the mouth of every one who has imagined  
excessive things,

concerning that womb which carries sanctity, that has cleansed the  
unclean.

In high rank stood the Teaching, with open face,  
and it has placed investigation under its footsteps, which has been  
barking at it.

708

485 Since the Word has shone out, the daughter of the day, over the  
darkness  
and the children of night in the splendour of light came to an end and  
have been scattered.

The thoughts of doubt have fled from the daughter of David,  
and the soul has been enlightened (realizing) that virginity was not  
dissolved.

She was Virgin when the angel spoke with her,  
490 and she was Virgin, when she received the Only Begotten.

She was pure Virgin when the ray of the Father dwelt in her,  
and was Virgin when the child was growing in her bosom.

The Virgin carried that Mighty one, who carries the creation,  
and was Virgin when she gave birth to the Power of the Father.

495 The Son of God sucked virginal milk from her,  
and in a virginal way, she embraced the fruit of the New life.

In her virginal body was pure milk for the Ancient Child,  
and in her virginity a luminous way was opened to the Sun who shone.

Virgin is Mary and permanent is her virginity,  
500 blessed is He who multiplied beauty of this pure one in her giving  
birth.













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